

THE CULTURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SUGARMILL:

THE IMPRESS OF THE SUGAROCRACY

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis an analysis is made of the relationship between the families which until recently controlled most of South Africa's sugarmills, and their sugarmill employees. The relationship is approached by way of a study of the culture of the sugarmill; by way, that is, of looking at the ideological and material connotations of the sugarmilling labour process as they manifested themselves in the sugar villages of South Africa. It is the principal concern of the study to demonstrate how the dynastic sugarmilling families, who are presented as a sugarocracy, impinged upon the culture of the sugarmill.

By perceiving the culture of the sugarmill as evolving out of the sugarmilling labour process, a materialist interpretation of historical evidence is indicated as a method for analysing sugarocratic domination. This method is applied to empirical evidence derived primarily through literary research. A further methodological consideration is displayed in the emphasis given to causal relationships between sugarocratic influences upon the labour process and workers' responses to that process. Because of the centrality accorded to the labour process points of reference are readily found in studies of sugarmilling in other milieux. Thus each chapter of the thesis is introduced with relevant material on sugarmilling in regions where it has generally been subjected to more social analysis than has been the South African case.

Arranged in three parts, the analysis begins with an account of the ascent of the sugarocracy since the turn of the twentieth century, and of the establishment and development of sugarocratic ideology and politics. In the second part, attention is focused on the sugarmill, with chapters devoted to sugar technology and the technical division of labour, the racial division of labour, and work-place control, respectively. The final part is given to an examination of life in the sugar village, and to the question of how, by means of accommodation and resistance, workers coped with the conditions under which they worked and lived.

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
PART 1 THE SUGAROCRACY	
1 The Ascent of the South African Sugarocracy	17
Sugarocrats Ascendant	18
The Prelude to the Sugarocratic Era in Natal: 1850 - 1905	21
The Natal Sugarocrats and their Consorts: 1905 - 1962	25
Summary	53
2 The Sugarocracy and the Political Economy of Sugar Production	54
Natal and the International Sugar Market	55
Millers-cum-Planters, the Refinery Question, and Growers' Protests: 1905 - 1914	59
The Sugarocracy Fights Through the Inter-War Period: 1914 - late 1930s	63
Centralisation and Consolidation of Sugarmill Ownership: late 1930s - 1962	72
Corporate Intrusions into the Sugar Industry after 1962	83
Summary	85
3 The Culture of the Sugarocracy	89
Conceptualising the Culture of a Sugarocracy	90
The Domestic and Community Life of the South African Sugarocracy	92
Ideology, Intellect and Image	106
Political Life	127
Summary	132
PART 2 THE SUGARMILL	
4 Sugar Technology and the Technical Division of Sugarmill Labour	135
Sugar Technology and the Division of Sugarmill Labour	135
From Plantation to Industrialised Sugarmilling in Natal: 1850 - 1905	144
The Centralised Sugarmill in the Making: 1905 - 1914	153
Responding to Global Crises: 1914 - late 1930s	157
The Sugarmill during the War and the Post-War Period of Expansion: late 1930s - 1962	163
Scientific Management in the Sugarmills: the Post- 1962 Period	178
Summary	188

5	The Racial Division of Sugarmill Labour	190
	Cheap Sugarmill Labour	191
	Black Sugarmill Workers in Natal; the Pre-Sugarocratic Period: 1850 - 1905	195
	The Twilight Years of Indentured Labour in Natal: 1905 - 1914	207
	Black Sugarmill Workers in the Aftermath of the Indenture System: 1914 - late 1930s	211
	The Immigrant Sugarmill Artisanate: 1850 - 1905	216
	"Civilised Labour" in the Sugarmills: 1905 - late 1930s	221
	The Reproduction of the Racial Division of Sugarmill Labour	227
	Summary	237
6	Authority, Control, and Autonomy	239
	Control and Authority	240
	Sugarocratic Owner-Operatives in Natal	251
	Managing Directors, General Managers, and Factory Managers	256
	Technologists' Authority and Pan-Boilers' Autonomy	259
	The Development of Structural Control	270
	Summary	280
PART 3 THE "COMMUNITY"		
7	The Sugar Village	283
	Sugarocrats and Social Control	284
	The Natal Sugar Village	292
	Sugarmill Workers' Housing and Health during the Indentures Period: 1860 - 1914	295
	Prelude to Sugarocratic Welfarism: 1914 - late 1930s	301
	Sugarocratic Paternalism and Reformism in Social Control Methods: late 1930s - 1962	311
	Summary	322
8	Workers' Responses	324
	Accommodation and Resistance	325
	Responding to the Indian Indenture System in Natal: 1860 - 1914	330
	First Manifestations of Industrial Action: 1914 - late 1930s	337
	Confronting the Sugarocracy: late 1930s - 1962	345
	Contesting Institutionalised Capital/Labour Relations: the Post-1962 Period	363
	Summary	376
CONCLUSION		378
Appendix 1 : Sugar Company Directorates		387
Appendix 2 : Sugarmill Ownership in Southern Africa		392
References		404

LIST OF FIGURES

1	Summary of Biographical Information on First Generation Sugarocrats in Natal	35
2	Aftermath of Sugar Company Take-Overs in 1962	83
3	Ownership and Control of Sugarmills in South Africa, 1980	86
4	Sugarocratic Family Ties - Huletts	100
5	Sugarocratic Family Ties - Campbells/Armstrongs	101
6	Sugarocratic Family Ties - Crookes'	102
7	1000-Ton Sugarmill, British Dominions, c 1935	141
8	Typical Natal Sugar Plantation's Wage Bill, 1866	147
9	Wages of White Sugar Plantation Staff in Colonial Natal, 1885	151
10	Mount Edgecombe Sugarmill's Production Costs, c 1900	152
11	Wage Schedules, 1942 - 1961	175
12	Wage Schedules, 1962 - 1981	185
13	Paterson Job-Evaluation Criteria	186
14	African Workers' Wages in Colonial Natal	203
15	White Artisans' Wages in Colonial Natal	217
16	Mount Edgecombe Sugarmill's Wage Bill, 1899	218
17	Indian Sugarmill Workers' Occupational Histories	231
18	Family Ties Among "Mauritian" Sugarmill Workers	233
19	Movements of Selected Engineers and Chemists, 1930 - 1960	235
20	Pan-Boilers in Natal, 1880-1905	266

LIST OF TABLES

1	Growers' Cane Supplies to Three Sugarmills, 1912-1920	68
2	Quantity of Sugar Handled by Agents, 1920-1922	72
3	Effect of Enlarged Mills on Sugar Recovery, Tongaat, 1899-1921	154
4	Division of Sugarmill Labour, 1940	167
5	Sugarmill Apprenticeships, 1960s and 1970s	180
6	Graduating Sugar Technologists, 1964-1978	182
7	Graduates Employed in the Sugar Industry, 1981	182
8	Free Indian Sugar Workers' Wages, 1870s	200
9	African Workers' Monthly Wages, 1866-1885	201
10	The 25 Largest Employers of Indians in Natal, 1895	205
11	Sugar Workers in Natal, 1920s	214
12	Sugarmills Reporting on Chemical Control, 1925-1931	262
13	Suicide Rates Compared: India and Natal	331
14	Sugarmill Workers' Strikes, 1918-1954	338
15	NSIEU Membership, 1941	352

MAP

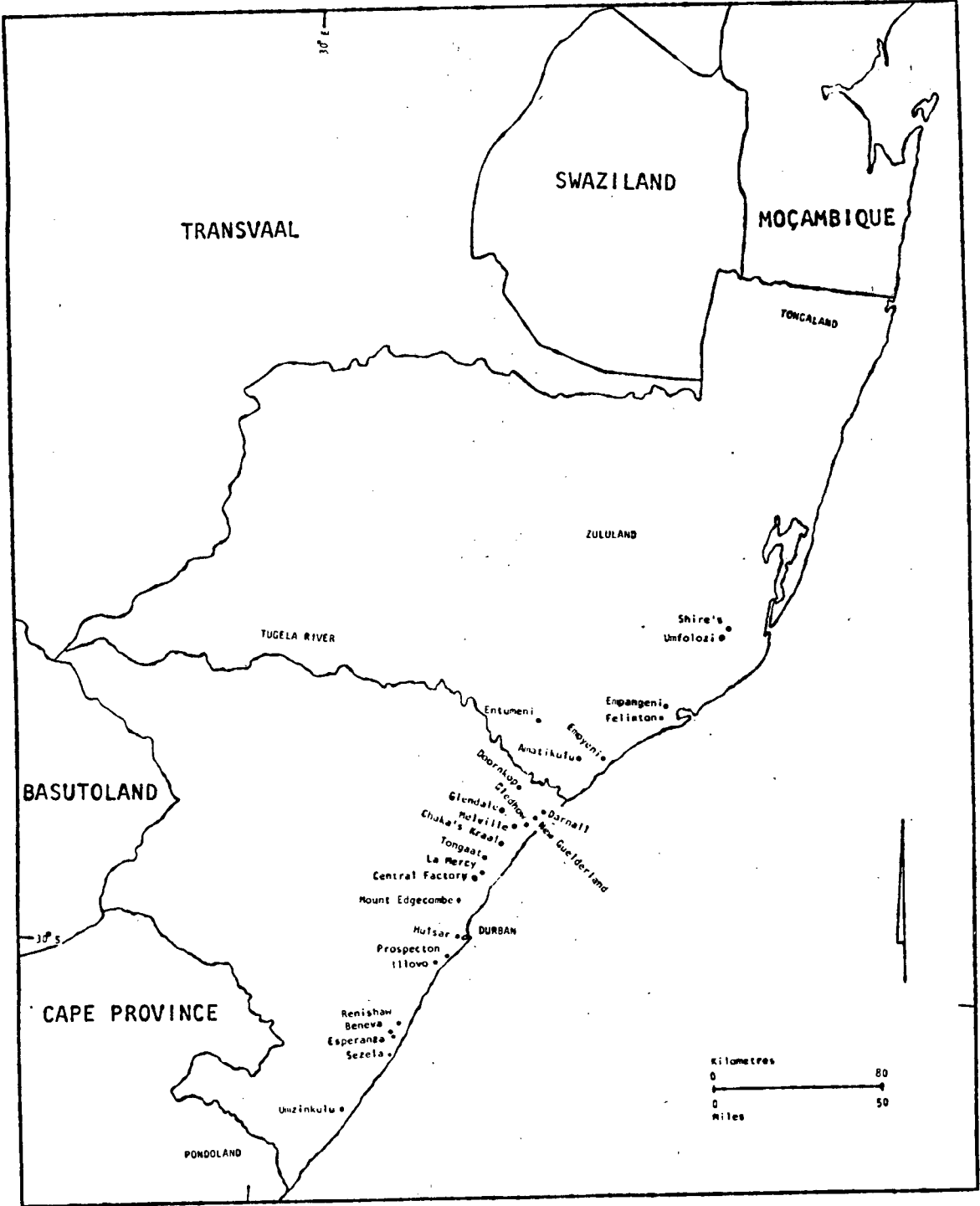
Sugarmills in South Africa, circa 1930
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PREFACE

Twenty years have elapsed since Manuel Moreno Fraginals first had his *El Ingenio* published. Now available also in English, the book is unsurpassed as a beacon for students of the social and economic history of the sugarmill. The author's intimate acquaintance with the world of sugar-making enabled him to infuse his book with a richness that seldom comes of literary research alone; this was a singular strength of his work. When I began my own research into sugar history, I was inspired by a deep affinity I have with the world of sugar-making. Although I could not resort to memories of sugarmill work, I could nevertheless approach my research with a sense of familiarity. Having spent my first seventeen years in a sugar village, and being descended from three generations of forebears who worked in sugarmills in Mauritius, India, and Natal, I was hardly alien to my field of interest. If my thesis has any strengths they may be attributed to the influence which my past experience has on my understanding of sugar history. I fear though that the pragmatism and compromises entailed in thesis writing have prevented me from doing full justice to that experience and understanding. Indeed, I regard this thesis as an intermediate study, coming between the articles in which I committed myself to print (probably prematurely), and a full-blown social history which encompasses detailed oral histories and greater experiential insight than I have so far been able to muster.

Apart from my sense of indebtedness to my mother and my father, I am thankful for the assistance which I have received from a number of people during the preparation of this thesis. The task of curbing me when I struck out from the disciplinary straight-and-narrow was performed by Ken Jubber; Peter Richardson read and commented on a draft of the thesis; Charles van Onselen helped to purge Chapter 8 of its least acceptable content; I enjoyed the co-operation and company of Daniel North Coombes at various stages; Jonathan Crush led me to certain uncatalogued archival material; Debbie Budlender lent her technical expertise; Ramela Bhaga typed the tables; and numerous librarians and many people in the sugar industry gave of their time and knowledge. I thank them all. Catherine accompanied me through the proof-reading doldrums, and she, Emma, and Zoë not only collaborated inestimably in other ways, they also provided me with a clear rationale for pressing on with the task. They know my feelings.

MAP: Sugarmills in South Africa, circa 1930.



ABBREVIATIONS

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
BEPO	British Empire Producers' Association
CDC	Colonial (later Commonwealth) Development Corporation
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CSA	Commonwealth Sugar Agreement
FCI	Federated Chamber of Industries
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
Hulsar	Hulett's South African Refineries
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
ISA	International Sugar Agreement
KC	Killie Campbell (Library)
NAD	Natal Archives Depot:
CSO	Colonial Secretary
CNC	Native Commissioner
IRD	Immigration Restriction
DPH	Public Health
NCLRC	Natal Coast Labour Recruiting Corporation
NLA	Natal Legislative Assembly
NLC	Natal Legislative Council
NPU	Natal Planters' Union (later SACGA)
NSA	Natal Sugar Association (later SASA)
NSIEU	Natal Sugar Industry Employees' Union
NSMA	Natal Sugar Millers' Association (later SASMA)
NUSMRE	National Union of Sugar Milling and Refining Employees
SACGA	South African Cane Growers' Association
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SALDRU	Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit
SAP	South Africa Party
SASA	South African Sugar Association
SASJ	South African Sugar Journal
SASMA	South African Sugar Millers' Association
SASPU	South African Sugar Planters' Union (later SACGA)
SASTA	South African Sugar Technologists' Association
SATLC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SATUC	South African Trade Union Council (later TUCSA)
SFAWU	Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union
SIEA	Sugar Industry Employees' Association
SMRI	Sugar Milling Research Institute
TAD	Transvaal Archives Depot:
LD	Agriculture
K	Commissions
GG	Governor General
ARB	Labour
MNW	Mines and Works
NA	Native Affairs
GNLB	Native Labour
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
ZPU	Zululand Planters' Union (later SASGA)
ZSM	Zululand Sugar Milling Company (later ZSM & P)
ZSM & P	Zululand Sugar Millers and Planters

INTRODUCTION

In the course of human history, vast numbers of people and lands of considerable extent have been bound up in the cultivation and milling of sugarcane in order to produce sugar for human consumption. For centuries sugar production spread on the expanding frontiers of European colonial empires,¹ a growth associated with the dual phenomena of plantations and slavery. With Africa's "human haemorrhage"² and the enslavement of people on other continents too, millions of lives were devoured by plantations, if not **en route** to the sugar colonies. Although in some sugar-producing regions indentured labourers replaced slaves, both groups of bonded workers were succeeded by wage-labourers.

The historical transition from slave to wage-labourer took place more or less concurrently with the transition in the sphere of plantation ownership and control. These transitions reflected the industrialisation of the sugar plantation. Plantation owners had formerly been essentially agriculturalists. They were succeeded by those who - by virtue of ownership of sugarmills which were centralised, capitalised, technologically sophisticated, and dependent on free labour - were essentially industrialists. Hence the distinction, in simple terms, between a plantocracy and a sugarocracy.

It is generally known that the domination of regional plantocracies over the lives of working people in the old plantation colonies was typically effected by means of a despotism which private property in slaves and other means of production made possible. Amongst the monumental works

¹ S.M.Greenfield, "Plantations, Sugar Cane and Slavery". In **Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies**, edited by M.Craton. Toronto: Pergamon, 1979.

² R.Dumont, **False Start in Africa**. London: Andre Deutsch, 1966, p.36.

of Eugene Genovese there is one entitled **The World the Slaveholders Made**.³ It is a title which conveys the enormity of the influence of English American planters over every aspect of the lives of generations of plantation slaves. Equally evocative of the distinctive social totality, or "world", centred on the omnipotent plantation owner was Gilberto Freyre's reference to the **bagaceira** in sixteenth to nineteenth century Portuguese America. The word denotes a storage place for bagasse, the residue sugarcane fibre expelled from the sugarmill. It also came to mean "the general life and atmosphere of the sugar plantation" in Brazil.⁴ Both Genovese and Freyre were concerned with the day to day social life of colonial American plantations. In this respect they were in communion with innumerable other writers with an interest in the social life of Europe's tropical colonies in America, the Caribbean islands, and the Mascarenes - the regions where sugar production historically stood out as the most pervasive economic activity. Around the colonial sugarmill there existed, according to this literature, a "world" or a **bagaceira**; a specific cultural milieu.

Against the backdrop of global sugar history, the South African case is somewhat special. The local sugar industry is comparatively recent in origin, and slaves were never used. Although a plantocracy was created in South Africa's former colony of Natal in the absence of slavery, it was rapidly overwhelmed by a sugarocracy. The sugar villages which were established on this sugarocracy's properties had all the outward appearances which characterised the old plantation colonies. The question arises: what, historically, has been the role of the local sugarocracy in shaping the culture of the South African sugarmill? It

³ E.D.Genovese, **The World the Slaveholders Made**. New York: Vintage Books, 1971.

⁴ G.Freyre, **The Masters and the Slaves**. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1946, p.xxiii.

is this question that this thesis sets out to answer.

Conceptual Methods

There exists voluminous literature on colonial plantation (or sugar-producing) societies, and there are many precedents to this thesis insofar as it is a social analysis of culture in a sugarmilling milieu. These precedents have generally been cast in the mould of anthropological "community studies", and they were usually informed by a functionalist theory of society.⁵ The only sociological treatise which has been written on the South African sugar industry to date, American sociologist Pierre van den Berghe's **Caneville**,⁶ belongs to this tradition. Although van den Berghe questioned the authority of Parsons on certain issues, his study of Tongaat (thinly disguised as "Caneville") bore a strong resemblance to contemporaneous "community studies". Van den Berghe couched his analysis in accordance with the tenets of sociology's dominant paradigm of the 1960s; leaning more, within that context, towards a cultural pluralist than a Parsonian structural functionalist position. Whereas **Caneville** represents an a-historical analysis of Tongaat, this thesis rests upon an historical understanding of the sugarmilling "community". In another fundamental departure from **Caneville**, that "community" and its culture are approached here from a materialist perspective.

What is implied by a materialist approach is that analysis is rooted in

⁵ See S.W.Mintz, "Cañamelar: The Subculture of a Rural Sugar Plantation Proletariat". In **The People of Puerto Rico**, edited by J.H.Steward. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956; C.Jayawardena, **Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation**. London: Athlone Press, 1963; and M.M.Horowitz, **Morne-Paysan**. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967.

⁶ P.L.van den Berghe, **Caneville: The Social Structure of a South African Town**. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964.

"an empirical examination of the concrete processes of social life which are the **sine qua non** of human existence".⁷ The fundamental processes in question are the formation and conflict of social classes according to different relationships to property in the means of production. How this approach differs from the idealism embodied in **Caneville** has been clarified by F.Johnstone in his historical materialist study of racial domination in the South African gold mining industry.⁸ The crux of the distinction, simply put, is that whereas culture is accorded centrality in idealist explanations, it does not enjoy primacy over the social relations of production in materialist analyses of the patterns and processes of social life. In the words of Patrick Joyce, "whatever mediates the social relations of one class with another grows out of the soil of the means of production and is not imposed from without as 'superstructure'".⁹

The treatment of culture in this thesis has been inspired by the pioneering theoretical endeavours of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. The Centre's Richard Johnson, drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, has defined culture as

the common sense or way of life of a particular class, group or social category, the complex of ideologies that are actually adopted as moral preferences or principles of life.¹⁰

In other words, culture may be understood as the ensemble of collective responses to conditions of human existence. It encompasses forms of

⁷ A.Giddens, **Capitalism and Modern Social Theory**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p.22.

⁸ F.A.Johnstone, **Class, Race and Gold**. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, pp.8-10.

⁹ P.Joyce, **Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in later Victorian England**. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, p.xvii.

¹⁰ R.Johnson, "Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working-Class Culture". In **Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory**, edited by J.Clarke et al. London: Hutchinson, 1979, p.234. See also S.Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms". In **Culture, Ideology and Social Process**, edited by T.Bennett et al. London: Batsford and Open University, 1981.

consciousness and social practices, as well as material artefacts that are utilised in accordance with those subjective ways of interpreting and responding to objective conditions. It follows that cultural items may exist in many forms: there are those which are consciously forged, and others which are taken for granted; there is quotidian culture - the everyday "way of life"; there are national cultures; and there are work-place cultures.

The concern here is with a work-place culture and, more specifically, with the influence of employers on that culture. This thesis is premised upon the view that the sugarmilling labour process and its immediate human agents (sugarmill owners and employees) constitute the culture of the sugarmill; that it is these agents whose material interests have been reflected and served by that culture. Advancing from this premise, historical descriptions of the sugarmilling labour process in different regions were widely combed in pursuit of suitable conceptual touch-stones and comparative points of reference. The work that was considered most worthy of emulation was Moreno Fraginals' dialectical analysis of the Cuban sugar industry.¹¹ An exemplary work, Moreno Fraginals' analysis provided an astute exposition of Cuban sugarmillers' class rule, in particular their domination over sugarmilling techniques and personnel. It was from his work that the term "sugarocracy" was adopted; a major qualification being that whereas he used the term with reference to slave-owning sugarmillers, here it denotes owners of industrialised sugarmills. Thus a sugarocracy is here defined as a regional group of sugarmill-owners, whose sugarmills are staffed by free personnel - free in the sense of being neither owners of means of production nor owned themselves as chattels; and whose economic

¹¹ M. Moreno Fraginals, **The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba**. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.

interest it is to expand their capital in sugar by constantly developing the means of sugar production. More than that, a sugarocracy is presented as a group of dynastic families which is subsumed in capitalist society under a social class, namely a bourgeoisie.

This bourgeoisie, of which a sugarocracy forms part, is distinguishable from other classes firstly by the criterion of ownership of the means of production, and secondly by its use of labour as a commodity which is hired from the ranks of the proletariat for the express purpose of amassing capital. Classes of owners and workers - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat - are thus initially identified in terms of their respective relationships to the means of production. But without historical analysis and an inquiry into the culture and consciousness of the classes' constituent members, there is little to be inferred from this analytic, or objective, classification about the way in which these and other classes are formed, how they interact, and how they are transformed.

At the heart of the culture of the sugarmill lies the sugarmilling labour process. It is by this process that sugarmillers and sugarmill workers are drawn into a relationship which is ultimately based on (conflicting) material interests. It is the labour process which sustains the economic and materially-based relationship around which a distinctive work-place culture evolves. According to Palloix, the labour process is that

by which raw materials or other inputs are transformed into products having a use value. This process is a combination of three elements: human activity, or labour, which is set to work as labour power; the objects (raw materials, unfinished products etc.) upon which labour acts; and the means (means in general,

usually in the form of tools or even more complex machinery) by which labour acts.¹²

The first element of the labour process, as defined above, is here taken to include recruitment, the division of labour, and control; and the third, *viz.* the means, is taken to include technology and occupational know-how. Thus the labour process refers in general to conditions surrounding the presence of human labour at a particular point of production.

It is a fundamental characteristic of capitalism that human labour is exploited in the interests of capital accumulation. The labour process under capitalism involves not only the transformation of raw materials into products having a use value, but also the realisation of the exchange value of those products on the market. The difference between the exchange value of commodities (their market price) and the value of labour-power (the cost of reproducing labour-power) constitutes surplus value (or the value imbued in that commodity by labour). Capital accumulation is, then, effected by owners of capital through the appropriation of surplus value. It follows that the capitalist process of production embraces the labour process and the production of surplus value as a unity.¹³

The sugarmilling labour process under capitalism typically implies that the relationship, between owners and employees, which arises from the conditions of production and the consequences of the realisation and appropriation of surplus value, is more than a work-place relationship.

¹² C.Palloix, "The Labour Process: From Fordism to Neo-Fordism". In **The Labour Process and Class Strategies**. London:CSE, 1976, p.46. Quoted by C.Scott, "The Labour Process, Class Conflict and Politics in the Peruvian Sugar Industry", **Development and Change** 10:1(1979), pp.57-89. This is of course an elaboration of Marx's "elementary factors of the labour-process": K.Marx,**Capital**.Vol.1. London:Lawrence & Wishart, 1954, p.174.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.181-192.

This is because the domain of the sugarocrat (as owner and employer) usually extends beyond the site of production to the limits of a broader milieu. The milieu in question is geographically and socially delimited in the form of an agro-industrial complex - "an enterprise in which a sugarmill, other associated industrial plant and a cane plantation are under common ownership".¹⁴ It is within this broader milieu that the culture of the sugarmill comes into existence. It is in that geographical and social context that sugarmill personnel work and live; it is in that milieu that they subjectively and collectively face the economic and extra-economic practices of their employers.

In short, the culture of the sugarmill (its "interactional reality")¹⁵ is regarded as the ideas and practices which manifest themselves as responses to, and conditioning factors of, the sugarmilling labour process. This definition implies furthermore that the culture of the sugarmill is a dialectical process by which the relations of production, as much as the physical conditions of production, are translated into subjective meanings, relationships, and action. It is the task of this thesis to analyse the impress of the sugarocracy upon the substance and dynamic of the culture of the South African sugarmill; a task which involves laying bare the influence of the sugarocracy on the experiences of its employees.¹⁶

¹⁴ Scott, "Peruvian Sugar Industry".

¹⁵ The term has been used, with reference to the culture of the South African gold mine, by D.Moodie, "Mine Culture and Miners' Identity on the South African Gold Mines". In **Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response**, edited by B.Bozzoli. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983, p.178.

¹⁶ The implied relationship between experience and culture is substantiated in B.Bozzoli, "History, Experience and Culture". In **Town and Countryside**, op cit.

Research Methods

The empirical content of this thesis was derived principally by means of "desk research" - at many desks and in many places. Unlike the Caribbean, where colonial sugarmillers were keen to conduct research in order that they might have a good understanding of their historical subordinates,¹⁷ Natal's sugarmillers evidently never held such aspirations. Moreover, there are no accounts which might parallel Dunn's **Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624 - 1713**,¹⁸ and Ragatz' **The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763 - 1833**,¹⁹ nor is there a South African equivalent of Craton's detailed study of Worthy Park which spans three centuries of life on a Jamaican sugar plantation.²⁰ The most obvious remedy to this historiographical dearth would be to begin an analysis of South African sugar companies' records. Certain technical data aside, these records either do not exist or they are not generally available for scrutiny. So the researcher with an interest in the social fabric of sugarmilling in South Africa is turned in the direction of particular primary and secondary sources.

The chief sources that were tapped for primary material during the preparation of this thesis were the State Archives' Transvaal and, to a much lesser extent, Natal depots; the Killie Campbell Library in Durban; the **South African Sugar Journal**, published monthly since it was introduced almost 70 years ago in 1917; the **Sugar Year Book**, published

¹⁷ See P.D.Fraser, "Africa and the Caribbean", **African Affairs** 81(July, 1982), pp.425-432.

¹⁸ R.S.Dunn, **Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713**. Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1972.

¹⁹ L.J.Ragatz, **The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833**. 1928. Reprint. New York: Octagon Books, 1971.

²⁰ M.Craton, **Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

annually since 1931; and the **Proceedings** of the South African Sugar Technologists' Association, which date back to 1927. Also tapped in the search for primary data were colonial **Blue Books**, reports of governmental Commissions of Inquiry, records of parliamentary debates, and other published and unpublished official documents.

Archival material broadens the myopic perspective on sugarmill employees, black workers in particular, that publications emanating from within the sugar industry provide. However, the inaccessibility of certain company records and of holdings of certain libraries within the industry means that the full potential of empirical evidence has not been exhausted in this attempt to reconstruct the history of sugarmill culture in South Africa.²¹ Any social analysis of sugarmilling in South Africa will, under these circumstances, fall short of the depths and precision attained in the Caribbean studies or by contemporary researchers who have gained access to sugar company records in independent Mozambique.²²

On the question of secondary materials, historical and analytical studies of the South African sugar industry are few in number and there exists virtually no written history of sugarmill operatives. Regarding

²¹ While researchers are known to be received with every courtesy by the sugar companies - some companies are effusively hospitable to the outsider - company records such as minutes of directors' meetings and managers' correspondence are not generally accessible. Communications I have had with academics in South Africa and abroad confirm my belief that Tongaat's Amanzimnyama archives and the South African Sugar Association's library do not afford entry to social researchers. I have certainly been unsuccessful in trying to gain access to these sources. There are encouraging signs that senior officials in the sugar industry may in future adopt a less restrictive policy towards researchers.

²² Most notably J.Head, "Sena Sugar Estates and Migrant Labour". In **Mozambique: Proceedings of a Seminar held at the Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh**. Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, 1979; and L.Vail and L.White, **Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique**. London: Heinemann, 1981.

the works written this century, the major pieces germane to this thesis were two biographies and a review of the sugar industry until 1926, compiled by R.F.Osborn;²³ a biographical history of the Tongaat empire written by a former general manager of Tongaat Sugar Company;²⁴ van den Berghe's **Caneville**; a doctoral thesis on the economics of sugar cane production in South Africa;²⁵ and two journal articles, one co-authored and the other independently penned by Peter Richardson.²⁶ These last-mentioned journal articles and the forementioned thesis offered important contextual material, but little by way of detail on the culture of the sugarmill. Osborn's books, Watson's history of Tongaat, and other smaller biographical texts, fall into the same genre as the eulogistic books on the sugarmiller Hornung of Mozambique,²⁷ and on the Tates and Lyles of Britain.²⁸

Osborn's books, his **Valiant Harvest** in particular, are readily available in most South African libraries. **Valiant Harvest** was generously distributed by the South African Sugar Association to various libraries and senior sugar industry personnel, with the University of Cape Town being the recipient of four copies. By contrast, **Caneville**, the first published sociological writing on the local industry, is not freely

²³ R.F.Osborn, **Valiant Harvest: The Founding of the South African Sugar Industry 1848-1926**. Durban: SASA, 1964; **C.G.: A Great Natalian: A Biography of Sir Charles George Smith, KCMG, KSJ, JP**. Durban: C.G.Smith, 1966; and **This Man of Purpose: A Biography of Sir James Liege Hulett KtB, JP**. Edited by J.Hulett. Umhlali: W.H.Hulett, 1973.

²⁴ R.G.T.Watson, **Tongaati: An African Experiment**. London: Hutchinson, 1960.

²⁵ H.I.Behrman, "A Study of the Economics of Sugar Cane Production in Natal". PhD thesis, University of Natal, 1959.

²⁶ A.Graves and P.Richardson, "Plantations in the Political Economy of Colonial Sugar Production: Natal and Queensland, 1860-1914", **Journal of Southern African Studies** 6:2(1980), pp.214-229; and P.Richardson, "The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905: An Interpretative Essay", **Journal of African History** 23:4(1982), pp.515-527.

²⁷ B.M.Collin, **J.P.Hornung: A Family Portrait**. Kent: Orpington Press, 1972.

²⁸ G.Fairrie, **The Sugar Refining Families of Great Britain**. London: Tate & Lyle, 1951; and A.Hugill, **Sugar and all that...A History of Tate & Lyle**. London: Gentry Books, 1978.

available to the reader in South Africa. After a fruitless search in Cape Town for a copy of **Caneville**, which I had read as an undergraduate student, the search was extended through the inter-library loan service. Initially this search drew a blank, but eventually a pre-publication draft of the book was procured, seemingly the only version of **Caneville** available for public readership in the country. Only after personal communication with its author was a copy of the published version obtained.²⁹

Of all the publications so far referred to, only **Caneville** had anything directly to say about sugarmill workers, but not very much at that. The absence of detailed social studies of sugarmill work (to say nothing of culture) in South Africa, is exacerbated by the difficulty of disaggregating information about sugarmill workers when there has been no differentiation made in the available literature between field workers and sugarmill workers. This latter problem was presented by primary documents as much as by secondary commentaries, and it was most acute in the case of material on indentured Indian workers.

Only a limited amount of ethnographic research has been incorporated into the thesis. My ethnographic investigation was conducted principally amongst Mauritian workers and their descendants in the sugarmills about whom little has been otherwise recorded.³⁰ Although the thesis is in many respects a social history of sugarmilling, a vast field of oral history remains to be investigated before a full-blown social history can indeed be written. The most obvious topic deserving future ethnographic (and documentary) research is the sugarmill compound. A

²⁹ The assistance of Pierre van den Berghe is gratefully acknowledged.

³⁰ D.Lincoln, "Mauritian Settlers in South Africa: The Case of Sugarmill Artisans", *South African Geographical Journal* 66:2(1984), pp.133-151.

study of the compound as an institution,³¹ and of compound life, would constitute an extensive project in itself. Such a project would be an appropriate starting point for a detailed analysis of how sugarocratic rule was actually experienced by individuals and by different categories of employees.

Approaching the South African Sugarmill

Working towards the stated objectives of the thesis, within the context of the methods and resources described above, did not involve a clear-cut and linear programme. There were instances where choices had to be made and where circumspection had to be exercised in the presentation of empirical evidence. These warrant brief attention. As far as the selection of material for inclusion in the thesis was concerned, information about the agricultural side of the industry was drawn into the text only where it was considered directly relevant. Circumspection had to be exercised in dealing with personal details. Information gleaned during interviews was treated confidentially, and the anonymity of interviewees who spoke as individuals rather than as officials protected. Certain published material had also to be made impersonal. These precautions were especially necessary when dealing with Mauritian settlers and their descendants; firstly because some of them have suffered the indignities of prejudicial racial classification; and secondly because privileged knowledge was required to identify them in sources like voters' rolls and sugar industry directories and documents. Apart from these deliberate limitations, and given the scarcity of

³¹ Given that the sugar industry's Indian workers have always, during and since the indentures period, been housed with their families, the compound has played a particularly complex role as an "essential institution" of labour exploitation. See J.Rex, "The Compound, the Reserve and the Urban Location; the Essential Institutions of South African Labour Exploitation", **South African Labour Bulletin** 1:4(1974), pp.4-17.

existing analytical coverage of the local sugar industry, it was considered essential that as much empirical detail be drawn into the thesis as possible.

It would be presumptuous to suggest that this thesis fills all the lacunae in the existing body of analytical work on the South African sugar industry. Indeed, even in its limited objective of providing an analysis of one dimension of the culture of the South African sugarmill, namely the sugarocratic impress, the thesis leaves certain questions unanswered. I have been at pains in the foregoing pages to spell out the difficulties and frustrations encountered in trying to accumulate the documentary material upon which I have relied more heavily than alternative sources. The "gaps" and "loose ends" in the narrative testify to this problem. There are undoubtedly aspects of my approach to the subject which will also be regarded as shortcomings. Nevertheless the thesis does shed some light on previously unresearched terrain, and in so doing facilitates (and possibly invites) further study of the sugarocracy and its influence on the way of life of generations of sugarmill workers.

To approach the culture of the sugarmill in terms of the influence exerted thereupon by the sugarocracy demands at the outset a clear exposition of the constitution and culture of the sugarocracy itself. Chapters One, Two, and Three attend to this task; the first being concerned with the sugarocracy's ascent, the second with its economic circumstances, and the third with the quotidian, ideological, and political facets of its culture. Thereafter, a detailed analysis of the production process is made in three chapters which are devoted to social relationships within the sugarmill itself. In the following two

chapters attention is 'given to the social life of sugarmill personnel; Chapter Seven looking at the sugar village and the way in which the sugarocracy directly affected or sought to affect village life, and Chapter Eight looking at the history of sugarmill workers' responses to the sugarmilling labour process during the period of sugarocratic control. In the Conclusion, generalisations are made about the most important aspects of the sugarocratic impress. These final generalisations adhere to the periodisation adopted in the foregoing chapters; the first period during the sugarocratic era having been from 1905 to 1914, the second having ended in the late 1930s, and the third in 1962.

PART ONE

THE SUGAROCRACY

CHAPTER ONE

THE ASCENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SUGAROCRACY

Globally, the history of sugarocratic ascendancy has followed a similar pattern. While agronomic and climatic factors confine sugarcane fields between the tropical and sub-tropical latitudes, economic and biological imperatives necessitate the milling of sugarcane within close proximity to its source. Cane sugar production was until the end of the nineteenth century usually dominated by colonist plantation owners. With the abolition of slavery and the subsumption of plantation systems under a capitalist mode of production, the fundamental relations between owners and labourers were altered. The planter-miller unity was dissolved, and whereas previously every planter ruled over a plantation and each crushed his own cane using labour-intensive milling plant, the post-emancipation sugarmiller was forced to rationalise his use of labour and to constantly revise the technique of milling. The industrialisation of sugarmilling in this manner represented a first phase in the historical restructuring of sugar capital. It was this phase in the later half of the nineteenth century which heralded the rise of the sugarocrat. The next, slightly less distinct, phase in capital restructuring lasted roughly until World War II, and it was characterised by the absorption of estates and/or sugarmills by the larger sugarmilling companies which had arisen during the previous period of centralisation. This could be said to have been the age of the sugarocrat, the period of individual or family bourgeois control over sugarmills. The most recent phase, since World War II, is characterised by the domination of regional sugar industries by corporations, and by the appearance of agribusinesses.¹

¹ See R.Burbach and P.Flynn, **Agribusiness in the Americas**. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980, p.12.

In this chapter the rise of the Natal sugarocracy is examined. After tracing the course followed by sugarocrats in their ascent in other regions, the historical development of the Natal sugarocracy is described. This is done mainly by paying close attention to the individual biographies of the relevant people. What emerges from the biographical material is a general idea of the first-generation sugarocrats' route to their particular class position, and an idea also of how sugarocratic lineages developed, and who the sugarocracy's consorts were.

Sugarocrats Ascendant

World-wide, the second half of the nineteenth century was a momentous period in the history of cane-sugarmill ownership. Existing sugarmillers had to contend with the repercussions of the abolition of slavery; they were also presented with important new technical possibilities within their sugarmills. Of even greater consequence was the restructuring of sugar capital insofar as it was, on the one hand, responsive to these changed circumstances, and, on the other hand, associated with the entry of new capital into sugar production. The social changes brought about by the abolition of slavery in the old sugar colonies (and the growth of sugar capital), were implicitly related to the physical transformation of sugar production. The latter change involved the integration of new sugar technology in centralised sugarmills. In Natal, where sugar production began during this very period, the ascent of sugarocrats was conditioned more or less directly by this process of change which their foreign sugarmilling competitors were then experiencing.

When the plantation (or "Labat") system of the old sugar colonies in the

western hemisphere was transformed during the nineteenth century, there were according to Galloway three main types of response to its disruption.² Firstly, some countries, such as St Domingue, Jamaica, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, faced a prolonged decline in sugar production. In these regions plantations occupied only part of the cultivable land and thus former slaves had an alternative to plantation work as a livelihood. Martinique and Guadeloupe countered the resultant labour shortfall by importing indentured workers, but other sugar economies continued declining, some irreversibly, due to effective labour shortages exacerbated by inadequate sugarmill centralisation. A second group of countries, including Barbados, St Kitts, and Antigua, experienced an easy passage out of the plantation system. Although the transition in these countries was smooth, by virtue of the ubiquity of plantations, the fact that sugarmill centralisation was retarded meant that immediate prosperity was hampered. The third case in Galloway's typology of responses to the disruption of the plantation system was witnessed in British Guiana, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, where sugar production expanded. In these countries the labour question presented less severe problems for owners, financial support for centralisation was at hand, and markets were assured. In British Guiana, the initial outflow of former slaves from the plantations was redressed by the importation of indentured workers, while good soil fertility together with the large number of debt-free plantations attracted capital to the sugar industry. In Puerto Rico and in Cuba, expansion was stimulated by the collapse of the St Domingue sugar industry and the lifting of trade restrictions by Spain. In both of these countries slavery had been abolished relatively late (1873 in Puerto Rico and 1880 in Cuba) and

2 J.H.Galloway, "The Sugar Industry of Pernambuco during the Nineteenth Century", *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 58:2(1968), pp.285-303.

there were large free populations, as a result of which abolition had a minimally disruptive effect. Cuban owners were furthermore able to import cheap labour from Yucatan and China, and later also from Jamaica and Haiti (formerly St^t Domingue). Of crucial significance for Cuba and Puerto Rico was the rapid centralisation of sugarmilling, permitted by access to North American capital and its market at the end of the nineteenth century.³ In addition to these three main types of response to the disruption of the plantation system, a locally peculiar response was identified in Pernambuco, in north-eastern Brazil. The Pernambuco case was similar in many respects to the third type of response except that no foreign labour was introduced nor was there access to North America. Instead of expanding then, the Pernambuco sugar industry continued functioning at the pace at which it had been worked under slavery.

What Galloway's typology suggests is that the successful transition to industrial capitalist sugar production in the late nineteenth century depended on four inter-related factors; namely, fresh capital inflows, sustained supplies of cheap indentured labour or wage labour, centralised sugarmills, and reliable markets. These factors were equally critical in regions where sugar production was started during the nineteenth century. Hawaii had its first "permanent plantation" and

³ Although Puerto Rico's sugar industry had indeed expanded during the first half of the nineteenth century, it had stagnated towards the end of the century and its contribution to the value of the country's exports had been eclipsed by income from coffee exports. The sugar industry only regained its prominence after the collapse of the coffee producers in the late 1890s, and expanded in the wake of the American occupation in 1898 (See L.W.Bergad, **Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Sidney Mintz, **Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History**. New York: W.W.Norton, 1974, p.25, has gone so far as to suggest that emancipation contributed to the deterioration of the sugar industry. Puerto Rico does not therefore sit too comfortably in the place assigned to it in Galloway's typology.

sugarmill established in 1835 after a mercantile trading company had reached an agreement with the King and the Governor of Kauai over the conditions whereby land would be leased and labour supplied.⁴ Thus began a new plantation system which was to flourish with a subsequent influx of foreign workers and American capital, and with the support of an American market. In Moçambique, where sugarmilling began at the very end of the century, it was European capital and technology which turned to the sugarmillers' advantage the quasi-feudal **prazo** system of land tenure and labour exploitation.⁵ In that Portuguese colony contractual grants of vast tracts of land included the right to extract the labour of its inhabitants in the cane fields and sugarmills, and the Portuguese state offered the market protection necessary to assure the industry's progress.

Capital, cheap labour, centralised sugarmills, and protected markets were clearly the component parts of the machinery which had to be assembled and maintained by aspirant sugarmillers in the nineteenth century if they were to succeed in the face of foreign competition.

The Prelude to the Sugarocratic Era in Natal: 1850-1905

The Natal sugar industry's early growth in the 1850s and 60s was marked by speculative investment in comparatively small sugar estates. Once on its feet the sugar industry was not inevitably destined to a dependence on a plantation system for, as Richardson has pointed out, there were two other historically proven alternatives which might have suited

4 R.Takaki, "An Entering Wedge: The Origins of the Sugar Plantation and a Multi-Ethnic Working Class in Hawaii", **Labor History** 23:1 (1982), pp. 32-46.

5 D.Lincoln, "Capital and the Milling of Sugar in Moçambique before 1942", **Perspectives in Economic History** 1 (1982), pp. 30-42; and L.Vail and L.White, **Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique**. London: Heinemann, 1980.

Natal.⁶ On the one hand milling might have been done in independent central sugarmills, while on the other hand peasant production might have formed the source of sugarcane for the sugarmills. These possibilities were discounted by inadequate transport infrastructure, by the lack of state guarantees for capital, and by low levels of capital and credit availability, *inter alia*. These constraints placed the Natal sugar industry on a particular route, and in combination with the effects of the depression of 1865 - 1869, they led to a veritable revolution in patterns of sugar estate ownership in the decade 1864 - 1874. The concentration of ownership during that period, with the strong participation of merchant capitalists (in the absence of banks frightened off by previous losses in the industry), forged the Natal industry's financial and ownership structures into a likeness of those which characterised the older sugar plantations of the West Indies. The effects of this development were modified by the uneven growth of the sugar industry until 1905. Between 1878 and 1885, and again between 1890 and 1895, the price of sugar had fallen on the domestic and export markets, and the proportion of Natal's contribution to British colonial sugar production had contracted between 1875 and 1904.

Only the larger and most heavily capitalised sugar producers did not buckle under these economic pressures, and from the 1880s the small plantations went into a decline. Those who had the capital and other resources necessary to undertake technological change and intensify labour exploitation, and who could withstand the effects of market depression, were the ones to emerge by 1905 as "new" agents of production. These were the first "millers-cum-planters".

⁶ P. Richardson, "The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905: An Interpretative Essay", *Journal of African History* 23:4 (1982), pp. 515-527.

What factors shaped the early history of the millers-cum-planters? Capital and labour supplies were undoubtedly the most significant. E. Morewood, the first to mill sugar mechanically in Natal, had observed in 1853 that "To make Natal go ahead with giant strides, it only requires to be proved to capitalists at home...that sugar can be produced here by free labour, cheaper than in Cuba or the Brazils by slave labour".⁷ A decade later however, the onset of the depression and declining sugar prices signalled the beginning of a crisis for early sugarmillers. For those who had access to credit or to private funds, technological change and the concentration of estate ownership offered a means of surviving and ultimately taking advantage of these conditions. But, like Morewood, most pioneer sugarmillers had entered the industry with limited, if not negligible, funds at their disposal. An aggravating factor for the small and under-capitalised sugarmiller was the increasing scarcity value of land as its availability outside the Reserves diminished.⁸ If these factors had not, by 1874, removed small plantation owners from competition with owners of amalgamated estates and highly capitalised sugarmills, then declining sugar prices and returns on capital did so. The two periods of falling prices - 1878 to 1885 and 1890 to 1895 - followed a period during which capital returns had dropped sharply. In 1859 the owner of a 700 acre plantation, turning out 100 tons of sugar a year and paying 6% interest on his borrowed capital, could have expected an annual net profit of 14%;⁹ in 1876, seven years after the end of the depression of the late 1860s, an

7 E. Morewood, letter to **The Natal Mercury** 18 January 1853, quoted by A. F. Hattersley, **The Natalians: Further Annals of Natal**. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1940, p. 91.

8 Richardson, "Natal Sugar Industry"; and H. Slater, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal: The Natal Land and Colonisation Company 1860-1948", **Journal of African History** 16:2 (1975), pp. 257-283. The twin factors of under-capitalisation and certain millers' ineptitude have been noted by R. F. Osborn, **Valiant Harvest: The Founding of the South African Sugar Industry 1848-1926**. Durban: SASA, 1964, *passim*.

9 **Handbook to South Africa**. London: S. W. Silver, 1876, p. 414.

owner who had borrowed £20000 at 8% interest to establish his plantation, could have expected an 8% net profit.¹⁰ Capital alone was not the salvation of the sugarmillers who weathered these pressing conditions. The key to their success lay in their ability to maintain at sufficiently low levels their single greatest item of current expenditure, namely their wage bills.¹¹ The labour question was dealt with by the inception of the Indian indenture system, which meant drawing upon India for a resource which Natal's sugarmillers could not exploit locally at a sustained level and magnitude acceptable to themselves. It is against this background that the miller-cum-planter made his appearance.

According to Richardson,¹² there were three outstanding attributes of the unit of production controlled by the miller-cum-planter: firstly, it represented an enlarged estate and milling capacity; secondly, it displayed an increasingly corporate structure as company ownership replaced individual ownership; and thirdly, it implied the creation of an increasingly monopolistic structure of ownership over the industry as a whole. Though Natal's sugar industry had come to be dominated by such units of production, when Zululand was opened up to white settlement in 1905 the colonial state prevented the spread of miller-cum-planter units into the territory. The outcome of the Zululand settlement scheme as far as sugarmilling was concerned, was the first appearance in South Africa of central sugarmills which were supplied entirely by non-millers. Thus the Tugela river came to represent a regional boundary separating two forms of miller/planter relations. In spite of this departure from the patterns of control then obtaining, the first four sugarmills to be built in Zululand were owned by already established

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.415-416.

¹¹ Richardson, "Natal Sugar Industry".

¹² *Ibid.*

Natal sugarmillers. By 1905 then, the body of millers-cum-planters had emerged victorious from a struggle waged principally against structural factors. It was a struggle which obviously differed from that engaged in by other, older sugarmillers elsewhere who had had to respond to the abolition of slavery, yet both had very similar outcomes in terms of social relations. And it was only secondarily an internecine planter struggle which had yielded the millers-cum-planters who were to remain at the helm of Natal's sugar industry until the 1980s.

The Natal Sugarocrats and their Consorts: 1905-1962

It has been shown how the sugarmillers of Natal responded to local constraints and market influences, to the plantation system and to its dissolution. The question to be asked now is: who were Natal's first sugarocrats, and how did they achieve their status? Brief biographical notes follow on the first generation of sugarmillers who had emerged triumphant from the transition out of the plantation system and into miller-cum-planter production, and on those who entered the colonial sugar industry directly as millers-cum-planters without having experienced the transition as active participants. The names of the people in question are Saunders, Campbell, Reynolds, Crookes, Pearce, Armstrong, Hulett, and Smith.

Saunders¹³ The first of the settlers in Natal to establish a sugarmilling venture that would be controlled by successive generations of heirs was James Saunders, who was born in Mauritius in 1818. His father had gone to the island with the British invasionary force in

¹³ Biographical note condensed from E. Saunders, "Katherine Saunders: The Story of Her Life and Times". In **Flower Paintings of Katherine Saunders**. Tongaat: The Tongaat Group, 1979; and R.G.T. Watson, **Tongaati: An African Experiment**. London: Hutchinson, 1960.

1810, and there he entered a partnership to create the firm Wiehe et Saunders. In 1823 the family was transferred to London, where James Saunders received his schooling. For fifteen months in 1832 and 1833 he was a pupil at Charterhouse, of which school an uncle of his was headmaster. In 1837 he returned to Mauritius and worked there on several sugar estates, gaining experience that would be of relevance to him in Natal. While in Mauritius he made the acquaintance of two men who were later to become his partners in a land speculation company operating in Natal. Saunders again left Mauritius for Europe in 1850, and there he worked as a railway engineer. He was employed by the Great Western Railway, of which company another uncle of his was first secretary and general manager, and he was involved with various projects including the construction of the Thames tunnel. In 1854 he travelled to Natal as a holder of one-eighth of the shares in the Natal Company which had been formed by Saunders and his associates. One member of the syndicate was a Crown grantee of Tongaat Estate which, together with its small sugarmill, became part of the Natal Company's property. Saunders took charge of the estate, operating it for the syndicate until it was dissolved in 1860, and on his own account thereafter. Saunders installed a steam-powered sugarmill in 1861 and later relocated the plant when he purchased more productive lands. By periodically improving the sugarmill and expanding his land-holdings he had control of a large estate by the time of his death in 1892, when his youngest son Edward succeeded him as proprietor.

Campbell¹⁴ William Campbell, born in 1821, began his working years on a Scottish railway. His father had by that time been dishonestly dispossessed of the farm which might have kept William on the land. In

¹⁴ Biographical note condensed from E.Campbell, **The Life of Sam Campbell**. Privately published, 1933; and N.Herd, **Killie's Africa: The Achievements of Dr. Killie Campbell**. Pietermaritzburg: Blue Crane Books, 1982.

his late twenties, although already in the relatively well-paid position of line foreman, Campbell was taken in by the allure of Byrne's settlement scheme. He sailed for Natal with his family in 1850, but once there he did not immediately take occupation of the freehold land which the Byrne scheme qualified him for. Instead he bought a plot of land in Durban. In Durban he accepted a contract to build the harbour's north pier, a task for which his experience in Scotland had prepared him. Only in 1857 did he turn to agriculture when he bought 738 acres of abandoned land north of Durban. On this farm, which he named Muckle Neuk, Campbell experimented successfully with sugarcane and proceeded to borrow money from the Glasgow and Natal Sugar Company against collateral of land, buildings, machinery and crops. This loan enabled him to import a sugarmill of sufficient capacity to place him amongst the leading contemporary sugarmillers. His successes were cut short by his accidental death in 1865, when the Muckle Neuk estate passed into the hands of his eldest son, William.

Reynolds¹⁵ The brothers Thomas and Lewis Reynolds disembarked in Durban in November 1850 as Natal Company of London settlers. They first rented land on the Umhlali river where in 1852 they began growing sugarcane. In 1856 they were given the management of a farm, Oaklands, with Thomas in charge of the ox-powered sugarmill and Lewis overseeing the field work. Thomas travelled to Mauritius in 1860 to buy a second-hand sugarmill for Oaklands farm, and three years later he purchased the farm itself and an adjacent estate. He sub-divided the latter estate and sold the land to farmers who would be suppliers of cane to his sugarmill. In 1860 Lewis had left Oaklands to become the manager of Canonby estate, which he later bought in partnership with G. Wirsing.

¹⁵ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; and South African National Society, "The Reynolds of Sezela", 1981.

This partnership dissolved when Canonby was declared insolvent in 1869, but Lewis stayed on the estate as manager until 1874, when he bought at an auction the Umzinto Sugar Company. After Lewis' death in 1875, Thomas took over the Umzinto Sugar Company and assigned two of his own sons, Frank and Charles, to its operation. Another son of his, Arthur, had been given the responsibility of running the Glendale Sugar Estate which Thomas had acquired in the early 1870s. In 1880 the Oaklands sugarmill was moved to Glendale Sugar Estate and the following year the Oaklands farm was sold. When Thomas Reynolds died in 1885 his sugarmilling interests were concentrated in the Umzinto Sugar Company, on the south coast, and Glendale Sugar Estates, north of Durban.

Crookes¹⁶ Samuel Crookes arrived in Durban in 1860, having come from Yorkshire with his brother Charles. Charles Crookes walked to Pietermaritzburg to seek work there and Samuel remained in Durban where he became apprenticed to a wagon builder. In 1865 Samuel Crookes began working on Maryland estate as a wagon builder. Eight years later, in 1873, he bought the 600 acre Ellingham estate and on 100 acres he planted sugarcane. After erecting a small sugarmill, which began crushing in 1877, he was joined on the estate by his youngest brother Leonard who had recently survived a shipwreck on Robben Island. In 1880 Samuel returned to Maryland estate and made his home on Cypress Hill, after having bought the estate from its former owners, his brothers-in-law. Subsequently, in 1883, he bought another farm and its sugarmill, and integrated the machinery with that at Maryland. After the death of his wife in 1886, Crookes left Natal for the interior to become first a diamond- and then a gold-pro prospector, while his elder son George managed his estates. By 1894 he had returned to Natal and bought Renishaw

¹⁶ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; and SASJ 44:10(1960), pp.851-853, and 58:8(1974), pp.420-421.

estate from a brother-in-law. Once again he moved his milling plant to concentrate it all at Renishaw. In 1895 he took his sons George, Fred and Charles into partnership, and they assumed control over the sugarmill and estates when Samuel Crookes died in 1906.

Pearce¹⁷ William Pearce was born in 1855 in Durban, where his father was stationed with the imperial 45th Regiment. His parents later ran "a little roadside establishment" in southern Natal.¹⁸ When his father died in 1864, leaving a wife and six children, William was placed in the care of a local family. He stayed with that family until the age of fourteen. In 1871 he became apprenticed in the wagon building and blacksmith trade, and he followed his apprenticeship with an attempt at gold prospecting at Pilgrims Rest. Within a year he had left the gold fields and turned his hand to timber felling. When the second Anglo-Zulu war was fought in 1879 William Pearce saw action with the Alexander Mounted Rifles, a regiment which he had joined at the age of fourteen. After the war he practiced as an artisan for a brief period until in 1880 he was advised, on medical grounds, to change his occupation. For a time he was a transport rider and then an arrowroot farmer. The declining market for arrowroot forced him to abandon this crop and he planted his first sugarcane in 1887. In 1889 he acquired a sugarmill which he first used to crush cane in 1890. His success as a sugarmiller led to the formation of Illovo Sugar Estates. The company was floated in 1906 with three directors: William Pearce, the managing director, C.G.Smith, and Edward Saunders. In 1908 two additions were made to the board of directors in the persons of George and Fred Crookes. Pearce was elected chairman of the board in 1934 and he also became a

¹⁷ Biographical note condensed from *Illovo Digest* (December, 1965), pp.5-7, and (May, 1966), pp.5-8; Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*; and *South African Sugar Year Book* (1939-40), pp.215-216.

¹⁸ *Illovo Digest* (December, 1965), p.5.

director of C.G.Smith and Company and Gledhow Sugar Estates. By the time of his death in 1939 his heirs had their interests intertwined with the fortunes of the Crookes', the Reynolds', and C.G.Smith.

Armstrong¹⁹ George Armstrong was born in Australia in 1855 and at the age of five he was taken by his parents to Natal, where they settled on a farm near Verulam. After being schooled in the district, Armstrong served a four-year apprenticeship and then in 1876 he left for Kimberley where he found work with Atlas General Engineering Works. Six months later he entered a partnership to manufacture diamond washing machinery. During 1887 and 1888 he was on active military service with the British forces, returning then to a partnership as a digger in the diamond fields, and later becoming the manager of a diamond company. Although there are references to misfortune and loss after this time, by 1892 he was in a position to sell his interests in Kimberley "for a considerable sum".²⁰ He now left the diamond fields, where he had become a close associate of Rhodes', to embark on sugar production. He first made an unfruitful bid for the Blackburn sugar estate on the Natal north coast, but succeeded the same year, 1892, in buying the Verulam Central Sugar Factory with two of his brothers, W.G.Armstrong and James Armstrong. A year later he and James sold their shares to their brother and George left for America, to return shortly after the end of the Anglo-Boer war. In 1910 he, his elder son Athol, and Sir Thomas Hyslop obtained a concession to grow sugarcane in Zululand and they formed the Umhlatuzi Valley Sugar Company which would supply Hulett's Felixton sugarmill. The following year, 1911, the same three partners secured a milling concession in Zululand, and under the title Zululand Sugar Milling

¹⁹ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; SASJ 18:2(1934), pp.71-75; and **South African Sugar Year Book and General Directory** (1930), p.96.

²⁰ **South African Sugar Year Book and General Directory** (1930), p.93.

Company they constructed a sugarmill near Empangeni. Later, in 1917, Armstrong and his associates also purchased the Emoyeni Co-operative Sugar Company from the Koningkramer brothers, who had been milling their own cane since 1910. This estate was re-sold in 1921 to Delville Estates, a Hulett subsidiary. Then in 1929 Zululand Sugar Millers and Planters was formed to take over the Zululand Sugar Milling Company and 7500 acres of former Reserve land. This land was subdivided and offered to farmers who would have pro-rata shares in the new company, on condition that none would hold in excess of 800 acres. Eight hundred acres were also set aside and profits therefrom would form the basis for an employee pension scheme. Proceeds from another 500 acres would be held in trust to maintain the Empangeni hospital until it was taken over by the state; thereafter the revenue would go to church, educational, or charitable institutions in the Lower Umfolozi district. At the time of his death in 1934 George Armstrong was still active as the managing director of this large and locally pervasive sugar concern.

Hulett²¹ James Liege Hulett, persuaded by the combined effects of the Crimean war and unemployment in Britain, sailed to Natal in 1857 to take up the offer of a job as assistant to a Durban chemist, a friend of his father's. Hulett embarked with £30 (which an uncle had lent him), of which £20 would pay his fare. Soon after his arrival in Natal he secured a lease over land at Mount Moreland, where he built a house for himself and his parents and family who then also emigrated from Britain. After eighteen months of cultivating arrowroot he was appointed as manager of Driefontein, a cotton farm, where he again built a house, this time with the assistance of Alf Townsend's father. The farm was unsuccessful but by borrowing money Hulett was able to meet its owner's

²¹ Biographical note condensed from R.F.Osborn, **This Man of Purpose: A Biography of Sir James Liege Hulett**. Edited by J.Hulett. Umhlali:W.H.Hulett, 1973; and SASJ 41:1(1957), pp.475-479.

terms of sale. It was at Driefontein that Hulett began trading with Zululand, where there was a market for the mealies and sweet potatoes which grew on his farm. When he took out a lease on a further 600 acres of land, calling the farm Kearsney, he extended his trading interests - "As there was a big kaffir location in the neighbourhood, I opened a store and at one time had a fairly flourishing business".²² On the proceeds of Driefontein and in a short-lived partnership with his father-in-law, Hulett bought Kearsney and additional land north of the Umvoti river. In 1892 he was in a position to put into operation with £50000 capital a tea company under the style of J.L.Hulett and Sons Ltd. His success as a tea grower, packer, and distributor enabled him in 1901, at the age of 64, to make his debut in the sugar industry. He acquired 3000 acres of land, named it Tinley Manor, and had his first sugarmill built on it. Then in 1906 a second sugarmill was built at Darnall to crush the excess cane cut on his estates. The latter sugarmill was also supplied by growers who had 99-year leasehold on their respective portions of the farm De Jager's Kraal, which Hulett had bought for that purpose. In the interim Hulett had moved his headquarters (in 1903) from Kearsney to Durban. From there he stood poised to spread his empire by successfully tendering in 1905 for the erection of two concession sugarmills in Zululand. The first of these was opened in Amatikulu in 1908 and the other in Felixton in 1911. When he died in 1928 Hulett left to his heirs controlling interests in five sugarmills, a refinery in Durban, and vast sugar estates, *inter alia*.

Smith²³ Charles George Smith was born in England in 1858 and in 1861 was taken to Natal where his mother's uncle, Henry Leuchars, had a

²² Osborn, **Man of Purpose**. p.24.

²³ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; and R.F. Osborn, **C.G.: A Great Natalian: A Biography of Sir Charles George Smith**. Durban:C.G.Smith, 1966.

coffee plantation. His father, intent on independently seeking opportunities in Natal, left the family, and young C.G.Smith returned to London with his mother in 1868. At the age of twelve he ran away from home to work in the City. For two years he worked by day and attended night schools. In 1873, at the age of fifteen, he made his way back to Natal where his first job was as a store assistant. Smith's father was by then a bookkeeper for W.B.Lyle, who gave Charles employment in his store where Richard Addison was also working. Lyle later sent C.G.Smith to manage Kirkly Vale estate and there the latter met Frank Reynolds, with whom he would in due course become closely associated. Following an altercation with Lyle, Smith left his employ and went to work as an auctioneer for Beningfield. His work with Beningfield was interrupted when he fought as a trooper during the Anglo-Zulu war, and then in 1888 he and a fellow employee left their employer to start their own auctioneering business. In 1893 Smith withdrew from the partnership and practiced as an independent auctioneer and trader. He built up his business by buying a ship to ply the coastal route, and by forming the South African Supply and Cold Storage Company. In 1897 he floated, with Frank Reynolds, the Elandslaagte Coal Mining Company, and then further expanded his mining interests to become the largest shareholder and chairman of Cambrian Colliery. In 1904 Smith and his associates J.C.Maydon, Charles and Frank Reynolds, A.Hepburn, and E.Acutt acquired Umzinkulu Sugar Estates from a company in which the Campbells had been directors. During the same year, 1904, Smith formed C.G.Smith & Company. In 1919 Smith's company bought Umzinkulu Sugar Estates and renamed it Umzinkulu Sugar Company. In the interim Smith had been party to the formation of Illovo Sugar Estates, which in 1914 bought a plantation in Moçambique and renamed it Beira-Illovo Sugar Estates. Smith was chairman of the board of this subsidiary until 1917, when he took it over in his own name. He held the company in Moçambique until

1920, when he sold it to a Portuguese company. While his venture in Moçambique was in progress Smith had also been active in Natal. In 1916 he formed the Chaka's Kraal Sugar Company with Frank Reynolds, G.J.Crookes, S.F.Crookes, J.J.Crooks, and William Pearce. The same group bought Gledhow Sugar Estates from Friend Addison in 1920, and in 1928 C.G.Smith gained possession of La Mercy Sugar Estates. Three years later the La Mercy sugarmill was sold to Tongaat, and in 1934 the Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal Sugar Company was formed to take over Gledhow Sugar Estates and Chaka's Kraal Sugar Company, and to amalgamate them with two estates already owned by C.G.Smith and Company. Meanwhile in 1927 Smith had established Smiths Coasters as a private company. C.G.Smith died in 1941 without descendants.

In addition to the people listed above as first-generation Natal sugarocrats (whose biographies are summarised in Figure 1), there were a few other nineteenth century sugarmillers whose families remained within the ambit of the sugarocracy until well into the twentieth century, but were displaced from the sphere of sugarmill ownership and control by World War II. There were nineteen sugarmills which operated outside the control of the sugarocracy at the turn of the twentieth century, four of which had ceased crushing or were sold before World War I, and another eight of which had been closed or sold to the sugarocracy by 1922. Of the remaining seven, three remained under the control of pioneering families until the late 1920s or beyond. These three families, the Platts, the Kirkmans, and the Hawksworths, have their histories briefly described below, together with that of the Addisons who, despite having sold their sugarmill before 1920, remained closely associated with the sugarocracy thereafter. The final four sugarmills to be accounted for are the New Guelderland, the Umvoti, the Glendale, and Chicks'. It is

FIGURE 1: SUMMARY OF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON FIRST-GENERATION SUGAROCRATS IN NATAL

	G S ARMSTRONG	W CAMPBELL	S CROOKES	J L HULETT	W PEARCE	T & L REYNOLDS	J R SAUNDERS	C G SMITH
BORN	1855	1821	1839	1838	1855		1818	1858
Arrived in Natal	1860	1850	1860	1857	at birth	1850	1854	1861
Reasons for immigrating	With parents from Australia	Settler under Byrne scheme		Recessionary effect of Crimean war	-	Settlers under Natal Co of London scheme	Appointed manager and 1/8 shareholder of Natal Co of London	With mother
Pre-sugar-milling experience	Apprentice; soldier; digger; diamond co manager	Railway co employee in Scotland; settler farmer	Apprentice; wagon builder; sugar farmer	Chemist's asst; tenant farmer; farm manager and trader; asst magistrate; JP; MLA; tea estate owner; Min of Native Affairs; Speaker	Apprentice; prospector; woodcutter; soldier; artisan; transport rider	Tenant farmers; transport riders; farm managers	On Mauritian sugar estates; railway co employee; land speculator	Store asst; sugarmill and estate manager; auctioneer's asst; soldier; auctioneer and trader; owner of cold storage and coal mining co's in Natal
Embarked on sugarmilling	1892 Buys Central Factory with bros J and W G	1861 On Umhloti river (1895, son Marshall floats Natal Estates)	1877 On South coast	1901 At Tinley Manor	1889	1863	1854	1904 By buying Umzinkulu Estates

shown after the following biographical notes that these four sugarmills were the only ones to change hands during the twentieth century without going to the above-mentioned sugarocrats or their descendants.

Platt²⁴ The brothers Sydney and Lawrence Platt reached Natal separately, within a year of each other. In 1849 Sydney started farming beans on the Isipingo Flat. He then, in 1852, turned to sugarcane growing and acquired a sugarmill for his estate, but later left the colony for North America. Lawrence Platt, who had departed from Yorkshire, "where he occupied a good position",²⁵ with 200 gold sovereigns, also took up land and began bean cultivation on the Isipingo Flat in 1850. Like his brother he too turned his attention to sugarcane in 1852, and bought his first sugarmill in 1854. When Lawrence Platt died in 1886 his son Alfred, who was married to the daughter of nearby Reunion sugarmill's owner, took over the prosperous and expanded Prospecton Sugar Estate. Upon Alfred's retirement, the management and control of Prospecton was assumed by his son Cecil. Alfred Platt died in 1938, and seven years later, in 1945, by which date the Platt family had amassed extensive property on the Isipingo Flat, Tongaat bought Prospecton Sugar Estate. The Platts' sugarocratic connection was cut when Cecil Platt died in 1950.

Kirkman²⁶ The Kirkman family's interests in sugarmilling began when John Kirkman arrived in Natal from Lancashire in 1868 at the age of twenty two. His first sugarmill was a small second-hand one, which he replaced with a new one in 1874. After World War I Kirkman enlarged his

²⁴ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; SASJ 17:10(1933), pp.525-531, and 26:11(1942), pp.557; and **South African Sugar Year Book** (1949/50), pp.174-175.

²⁵ SASJ 17:10(1933), p.525.

²⁶ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; and SASJ 6:9(1922), p.659.

estate's milling capacity by buying the sugarmill on Reunion estate when the lands were sold to Illovo. Kirkman was party to the formation in 1917 of the Uba Printing Company and he was its board of directors' first chairman. By the time of his death in 1922 he had formed J.Kirkman and Sons, and his son J.P.Kirkman succeeded him as principal thereof. The Kirkman's sugarmill was bought by Reynolds Brothers in 1928 and moved to Entumeni.

Hawksworth²⁷ Four Hawksworth brothers landed in Natal in 1868 and began working a mixed farm of 400 acres; 100 acres had been granted to the brothers, 100 acres had been obtained in the name of their father, and 200 acres they had bought. In the mid-1870s they started growing sugarcane, and although their father had lost most of the fortune he had made as a Scottish iron and steel manufacturer, he made them a present of a new sugarmill in 1875. E.W.Hawksworth left his three brothers in 1877 to farm independently at Beneva, and they continued sugarmilling until 1895, when they sold out to A.A.Smith for £2500. Meanwhile E.W.Hawksworth had resumed sugarmilling on his own account after his cattle herd had been struck by lung-sickness in the period 1880 - 1882. Using second-hand machinery he built his first sugarmill in 1883 and then in 1908 opened a new sugarmill. He extended his land-holdings to almost 2000 acres and leased 40 acres of land in the Ifafa Mission Reserve. His sugarmill was supplied by his own cane as well as that from three white and some sixty African growers. After his death in 1923, E.W.Hawksworth and Sons remained in that family's control until 1930, when Reynolds Brothers acquired the company's property.

²⁷ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; and SASJ 7:3(1923), p.209.

Addison²⁸ After disembarking in Natal in 1848, Dr H.W.Addison practiced medicine in Pietermaritzburg, but by 1862 he had a small sugarmill on a farm named Addington after his home in Kent. When he resumed medical practice in 1868 as district surgeon for the county of Durban (he founded Addington hospital there), his farm was left in the care of his son Friend Addison. The farm deteriorated during the young Addison's absence while fighting in the Anglo-Zulu War, but an unexpected legacy enabled him to erect a new sugarmill and buy another estate. At some time during the 1880s his brother Walter took charge of the cane fields, and in 1911 the brothers formed a private company in which name a new and larger sugarmill was commissioned in 1912. In 1919 the C.G.Smith group bought the Addisons' sugarmill and 12000 acres of their land. The new owners operated their acquisition under the title Addison Bros. until 1934, when it was amalgamated with Chaka's Kraal Estate.

While these last four families were being effectively pushed into positions which were peripheral to the sugarocracy as such, there were transactions taking place between other owners, whose sugarmills represented some of the obstacles to the complete conquest of the sugar industry by the strongest sugarocrats.

New Guelderland sugarmill²⁹ One of these was the sugarmill at New Guelderland which T.C.Colenbrander had started in 1862, eight years after his arrival in Natal from Java. Colenbrander's property included a large sugarmill; and possibly the largest sugar estate of the time, when he was declared insolvent in 1870. The Glasgow and Natal Sugar Company, which had purchased Colenbrander's property for £5750, was also forced by insolvency to sell in 1880. By 1882 the proprietors of the

²⁸ Biographical note condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**; and SASJ 9:8(1925),p.549, and 56:7(1972),p.315.

²⁹ Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**.; Natal Mercury 27.6.1961.

sugarmill were Ash, Colenbrander's son-in-law, and George Stewart, the sugarmill's engineer. Stewart's family was in control of the New Guelderland Sugar Factory at the time of his death in 1949. The sugarmill was then closed and moved to Chirundu, in Southern Rhodesia, in 1951.

Chick's sugarmill³⁰ Another case in point was Chick's sugarmill which began crushing in 1864 under the ownership and control of John Chick, who had settled in Natal in 1850. By 1870 the sugarmill was under the management of his two sons, and after the death of the second of these sons in 1905, the latter's widow and sons ran the sugarmill until 1926. Their land was sold in 1926 and their sugarmill was bought by John Shire, who was to begin sugarmilling on his own account in Zululand. In 1957 the Shire family departed from the sugarmilling sphere when their sugarmill was closed and once again relocated by its new owners, Ubombo Ranches of Swaziland.

Umvoti sugarmill³¹ The third case was that of the Umvoti sugarmill which was erected by the Colonial Government in 1861, at a cost of £8818, to operate as a central sugarmill in the Groutville Reserve. The sugarmill was initially supplied by African growers who received half of the proceeds of sugar sales, the balance of the revenue going to the government. The early history of the Umvoti sugarmill was marked by planters' protests, inefficiency caused by poor mechanical plant layout, and by resultant unprofitability. Eventually in 1900 it was sold by the government for £1000. Although it had crushed for much longer than any other sugarmill which had been supplied solely by African growers, the Umvoti sugarmill was a symbol to white sugarmillers of the perceived

³⁰ Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*; and SASJ 41:7(1957), and 35:1(1951), p.63.

³¹ Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*.

ineptitude of Africans in the conduct of sugar industry affairs: W.A.Campbell once recounted a conversation which had taken place between his father and one Colenbrander who

was called in to help them through their troubles and for some time ran the Mill and a committee comprised entirely of natives representing native owners! ...on many occasions when the Mill ran smoothly for a few hours without a stoppage, the native committee would come down from their kraals in a body and instruct him to cease crushing as they, in their opinion, considered the Mill required a rest. In their primitive minds, they considered that as oxen needed rest, so would machinery require rest. Orders were then issued to the 'Tombis to immediately fetch large quantities of beer to the Mill; the committee would then sit round, together with the Mill hands who were on duty at the time, and would partake liberally of the beverage.³²

In 1916 the Umvoti sugarmill passed into the hands of the Umvoti Central Sugarmilling Company, and then in 1919 it was taken over by the Mauritian-owned Melville Sugar Company.

Glendale sugarmill³³ Finally there was the case of the Glendale sugarmill which had been erected in 1880 by Arthur Reynolds. Glendale was sold to G.Nicholson in 1890, and he in turn sold it in 1920 to the Paruk family. This last sale represented the first (and only) successful penetration of an Indian family into the ranks of Natal's sugarmill owners.

More than providing biographical information, the foregoing pen-sketches serve to illustrate the continual process of centralisation which characterised the ascent of the Natal sugarocracy. It is seen how a few families controlled all but a small number of sugarmills by World War I. What is especially noteworthy about these sugarmillers is that they were, by and large, "self-made" capitalists. While one or two of the sugarocrats-to-be had arrived in Natal with independent means, their

³² Opening Address, *Proceedings, SASTA* 13(1939).

³³ Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*.

ascent was more generally dependent upon personally accumulated capital, and they were accountable principally to colonial labour power for their status.

Sugarocratic dynasties evolved from the combined practices of family company formation and inheritance. It was principally under the aegis of capital accumulated in the names of Armstrong, Campbell, Crookes, Hulett, Pearce, Reynolds, Saunders, and Smith, that the sugarmilling companies of lasting significance had already come to dominate the local industry before World War I; it was the second and subsequent generations of heirs to seven of the first-generation millers (that is, excluding C.G.Smith) by whom the sugarocracy was reproduced as a distinctive grouping in both the economic and political senses. By accretion of capital in sugarmilling, largely without threat of external contenders for ownership, and by internal coalescence, rather than dismemberment, the sugarocracy remained intact until 1962. Then high-pitched internecine struggle put asunder the sugarocracy as the Hulett empire was usurped by other sugarocrats. Therefore, although it brought further coalescence, 1962 also heralded the break-up of the Natal sugarocracy. The following descriptions take the story of sugarocratic inheritance up to the eve of the 1962 clash.

Saunders³⁴ Of James Saunders' male offspring (for sugarocratic daughters, while they might be heiresses, were excluded from sugar business), the oldest son Charles was by training and inclination destined for a senior post in the colonial administration, rather than

³⁴ Biographical notes condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest.**; A.Hugill, **Sugar and all that...A History of Tate & Lyle.** London: Gentry Books, 1978; Watson, **Tongaati.**; R.G.T.Watson, "The Old Order": A Tribute to Douglas Saunders", **Condenser** 5:1 (1963), pp.14-18; **South African Sugar Year Book** (1939-40), pp.193-195; and **Financial Mail** 29.1.1982, pp.431-432.

in the family company; the second son, Walter, after working for a time at Tongaat also joined the colonial service; and only the youngest son, Edward, bound himself to the sugar industry. Thus in 1882, ten years before his death, James Saunders named Edward the heir to his company.

By self-tuition and experience Edward Saunders became a knowledgeable sugarmill manager, and in some lean years for sugar producers he also broadened his experience by transport riding and trading. After the death of his father in 1892 Edward was left in sole charge of Tongaat, but, for want of finance he was unable to expand his sugarmill immediately. In 1894 he entered into a partnership with W.J. Mirrlees, the son of the senior partner in the Glasgow sugar machinery manufacturing company, Mirrlees, Watson and Yaryan. Tongaat Sugar Company was formed by Saunders and Mirrlees, with the latter's contribution being an investment of £15000. Still short of capital with which to expand according to Saunders' project, the partners borrowed £61311 from Marshall Campbell and David Don in 1895, by mortgaging over 5000 acres of land and pledging their new sugarmilling machinery as security. (It was in these formative years of the Tongaat empire, until 1897, that Robert Armstrong was contracted to transport the company's sugar to Durban by wagon.) In quest of yet further funds, Saunders went to Britain in 1899, the year in which Mirrlees retired, and floated Tongaat Sugar Company as a limited liability company in Liverpool. Saunders and Frank Reynolds were appointed as joint managing directors of the company, although it was mainly Saunders who performed an executive role. Despite the preponderance of Natal shareholders over British shareholders (11:2), it was only in 1918, after the advent of double taxation, that Tongaat was incorporated in South Africa. Under Edward Saunders the Tongaat empire grew by the absorption of other farms and sugar companies. An unsuccessful attempt to acquire the property

of the Addison brothers, which went to the C.G.Smith group, was offset by the purchase of the Umhloti Valley Mill and Estate Company in 1922. That company's sugarmill was moved to Maidstone to complement the existing Tongaat sugarmill nearby. In 1927 the two sugarmills were amalgamated on the Maidstone site.

By this time Edward Saunders' son Douglas was also involved with the affairs of the company. Douglas Saunders had spent his vacations from the University of Natal, where he was a science student, as an estate overseer with Tongaat Sugar Company. He had then gained a diploma in agriculture from Cambridge University, before doing an extensive tour, in 1925, of the sugar industries of Hawaii, Cuba, and the United States of America. In 1926 he was made assistant general manager of Tongaat, and there followed an appointment to the company's board of directors. In 1934, five years before his death, Edward Saunders handed over control of Tongaat to Douglas, who became managing director in 1939 and chairman in 1941. Under Douglas' direction the company continued on its expansionary path. In 1944 the Platts' sugarmill and estates were acquired, and in 1946 the Armstrong's Central Factory was exchanged for £840000 in Tongaat shares.

From 1955 Douglas' son C.J.Saunders began taking over control of Tongaat, with the chairmanship passing from father to son in 1963. C.J.Saunders, a graduate in science from the University of Cape Town and of economics and agricultural science from Oxford University, began working for Tongaat after gaining a year of practical experience at Tate & Lyle's refinery in Plaistow, England. Early in his career with Tongaat he was despatched on an international tour of research which led to important innovations within the company's operations. In particular, the entire transport infrastructure was revised and road

vehicles were substituted for railways as means of conveying cane and sugar; and the sugarmill was put into seven-day operation without the conventional Sunday close-down. C.J.Saunders was also later attributed with having inspired Tongaat's diversification outside sugar. No less significant was the influence he had over the course of events by which the structure of sugar capital was transformed in 1962.

Campbell³⁵ In spite of William Campbell's success in Natal, the early history of the Campbell family's participation in sugarmilling contained episodes of misfortune, and their sugarocratic status was only really assured some thirty years after William Campbell's death in 1865. Initially it had been Campbell's eldest son, also William, who had controlled his legacy, Muckle Neuk, with the assistance of his younger son Marshall. About ten years later Marshall left his brother and went to the farm Aberfoyle, which he had bought for himself. In 1877 William Campbell sold Muckle Neuk and Marshall was subsequently dispossessed of Aberfoyle after having stood, and lost, as guarantor for his brother-in-law. Marshall was taken on as a manager, first of Groom and Hill's estate, and later of Umzinto Lodge Estate. When the latter estate was declared insolvent in 1880, Marshall moved yet again to Cornubia Estate, which he had secured by means of a bank loan. In 1882 Cornubia was absorbed into the Natal Central Sugar Company, of which Marshall Campbell was made a director. This represented the first step towards regaining a place in the Natal sugarocracy for the Campbell family, but there still lay ahead a sequence of events by which their status was to be confirmed.

The Natal Central Sugar Company's life had begun with the assistance and

³⁵ Biographical notes condensed from Herd, *Killie's Africa*; Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*; *South African Sugar Year Book* (1930), pp.70-71; and KCM 32753, Marshall Campbell.

involvement of the Oriental Banking Corporation. In 1876 the Mount Edgecombe estate belonging to Smerdon had been bought by a Mauritian, whose idea it was to start a central sugarmill there by inducing the Oriental Banking Corporation to transfer to Natal a redundant Mauritian sugarmill. This plan was given effect in 1878 by the newly-formed Natal Central Sugar Company. Marshall Campbell and David Don, a former Oriental Bank manager, bought the company from the bank after it went into liquidation in 1890. Campbell proceeded to float Natal Estates Limited in London during 1895, in order to take over the Natal Central Sugar Company and to buy adjacent estates. Now the Campbell family was fully restored to its sugarocratic standing.

Marshall's son W.A.Campbell joined the headquarters staff of Natal Estates in 1900 at the age of twenty. When in 1902 the company bought the Prospect Hall Estate, which had its own sugarmill, W.A.Campbell was made manager thereof. In 1906 the young Campbell was made junior managing director of Natal Estates. Marshall Campbell died in 1917 and his son succeeded him at the head of the company. W.A.Campbell's son Urban also joined in the management of Natal Estates, and the Campbell family maintained control thereof until 1962.

Reynolds³⁶ Following the death of Thomas Reynolds in 1885, his sons lent themselves with some vigour to the continued task of expansion. In 1890 Arthur Reynolds sold Glendale, but at about the same time Reynolds Bros. Ltd. was incorporated in England with a capital of £100000 and with the brothers Frank and Charles Reynolds on its board of directors. It was to Frank in particular that the development of the Reynolds' empire could be attributed, and it is of some interest to note that an

³⁶ Biographical notes condensed from Osborn, **Valiant Harvest.**; "Reynolds of Sezela"; SASJ 41:8(1957), pp.637-645; and **South African Sugar Year Book and General Directory** (1930), pp.31-43.

uncle of his, a wealthy English tanner, frequently gave him financial backing. In 1907 Reynolds Bros. was re-incorporated in Natal with a capital of £150000. In 1913, the year following the Reynolds Bros. take-over of Bazley Bros., the company embarked on a programme of intensive expansion. Its capital was again restructured, and now George Crookes became joint managing director with Frank Reynolds. During the next year construction began on Reynolds Bros.' new Sezela sugarmill, and thereafter the company's estates were continually enlarged. Amongst the Reynolds Bros. acquisitions were the property of J.Kirkman and Sons, bought in 1928, and E.W.Hawksworth and Sons' estates, bought in 1930. While the company was growing to comparatively enormous proportions, the Reynolds family's controlling interests were being gradually thinned as C.G.Smith, the Crookes' and the Reynolds' joined forces as sugarmillers. When Frank Reynolds died in 1930, his position as chairman and managing director of Reynolds Bros. was assumed by G.J.Crookes, and although his immediate heirs still held a large stake in the company, they had no executive part to play.

Crookes³⁷ The joint Reynolds-Smith-Crookes ventures produced an intricate web of control over a large part of Natal's sugar industry, with the Crookes dynasty emerging ultimately at the forefront. The brothers G.J., S.F., and J.J.Crookes were all involved in the running of the company established by their father, and they contributed to the direction of the other sugar companies which they controlled in conjunction with the Reynolds' and C.G.Smith. In addition to their being directors on the boards of Crookes Bros. Ltd., Reynolds Bros. Ltd., C.G.Smith and Co. Ltd., and Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal Sugar Co. Ltd., G.J.Crookes was on the board of Umzinkulu Sugar Co. Ltd. and he was

³⁷ Biographical notes condensed from SASJ 20:1(1936), pp.25-32, 32:6(1948), p.373, 43:2(1959), p.125, 50:3(1966), p.293, 54:10(1970), p.673, 57:3(1973), p.113, and 58:8(1974), pp.420-421.

chairman and managing director of Reynolds Bros. until his death in 1948; and J.J.Crookes was chairman of Crookes Bros. Descendants of these three Crookes brothers followed their forebears into these companies as directors and senior managers. F.N.N.Crookes began in the Renishaw sugarmill in 1923 as a laboratory assistant and left seventeen years later after having become first the chief chemist and then factory manager. After some years as a cattle farmer he resumed his links with sugarmilling in 1951 when he was appointed to the Crookes Bros. board of directors. In 1955 he joined the Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal directorate and was chairman of that board between 1963 and 1966. In 1966 V.J.S.Crookes retired as general manager of Crookes Bros., and the same year T.C.B.Crookes became the company's managing director while G.D.D.Crookes was made general manager of Umzinkulu Sugar Co. The two last-mentioned Crookes' also became directors of other companies within the Smith group. Meanwhile many of G.J.Crookes' directorships had been taken over by his son G.V.Crookes, who was the most senior of the Crookes lineage in sugarmilling until his death in 1970. He had been, with C.J.Saunders and W.A.Campbell, a prime mover in the take-over of Hulett's.

Pearce³⁸ When William Pearce died in 1939, his three sons were already in prominent positions of control over Illovo Sugar Estates. B.J.W.Pearce received his training in sugar technology at Louisiana State University before joining Illovo as manager. In 1922 he took the position of general manager of Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal Sugar Co., and he held that post and the chairmanship of Illovo's board at the time of his death in 1949. R.L.Pearce was appointed to Illovo's board of directors in 1934 and he remained there as managing director until his death in 1952. B.E.D.Pearce, who had also studied sugar technology at Louisiana

³⁸ Biographical notes condensed from *Proceedings, SASTA* 21(1947), p.vi; *SASJ* 36:4(1952), p.247, 56:5(1972), p.193, *South African Sugar Year Book* (1939-40), pp.215-216, (1948-49), p.247, and (1951-52), p.121.

State University, and who had visited the sugar industries of the United States, Fiji, Cuba, and Australia, began at Illovo in 1923 as factory manager. In 1934 he went onto Illovo's board of directors, and he was joint managing director thereof when he died in 1952. A third generation of the Pearce family maintained dynastic continuity in the person of O.W.M.Pearce, the son of B.J.W.Pearce. He followed his training at Illovo with studies at Louisiana State University, and then joined the staff of the SASA Experiment Station. A few months after his return to Natal he went back to Illovo as its assistant manager. In 1952 he became the company's general manager, and in 1956 he was appointed Illovo's managing director.

Armstrong³⁹ When George and James Armstrong sold their shares in Verulam Central Sugar Factory to their elder brother W.G.Armstrong, he formed a private company, Central Factory (Pty) Ltd., which he ran with the assistance of a fourth brother. Robert Armstrong had begun working in a general store in Verulam before joining his brothers on the Kimberley diamond fields. When W.G.Armstrong died in 1925, it was Robert who succeeded him as managing director of Central Factory. He was in turn succeeded after his death in 1942 by his son R.S.Armstrong. Four years later, in 1946, Central Factory was bought by Tongaat, and R.S.Armstrong was taken onto the Tongaat board of directors. It was he, R.S.Armstrong, who was the first chairman of Hulett's after its takeover.

Hulett⁴⁰ Written into the articles of J.L.Hulett and Sons at its formation in 1892 was the clause that

³⁹ Biographical notes condensed from Osborn, *Valiant Harvest.*; SASJ 54:12(1970), p.791; and *South African Sugar Year Book* (1941-42), p.214.

⁴⁰ Biographical notes condensed from Osborn, *Man of Purpose.*; SASJ 51:1(1967), p.73, 56:5(1972), p.197, and 58:11(1974), p.573.

the founder should be Chairman and Managing Director for the term of his life, if so long willing to act, at a salary of One Hundred Pounds per month, and shall be empowered to substitute any other Director as Managing Director in his place. Albert Saxe Liege Hulett and William Arthur Hulett shall be two of the first Directors of the Company.⁴¹

And so it was that the Hulett dynasty began its life, first with interests in tea and later in sugar. A.S.L.Hulett, the eldest son of the company's founder, duly took over the position in the company vacated by his deceased father. He was initially assisted by his younger brother Horace, who had formerly been the company's secretary and who was later to become the managing director of Hulsar. Although A.S.L.Hulett's eldest son became a director of Sir J.L.Hulett and Sons, it was a younger son Guy who succeeded him in office. Another Hulett to have a seat on the company's board was Jack, son of Horace. Jack Hulett had started working on the family's tea estates, and later went to Ceylon to study tea production in that country. This training was followed by an appointment as general manger of the Kearsney tea estates. Ten years thereafter he was made general manager of Hulett's Natal sugarmills, and in 1956 he joined the company's directorate as an alternate director. He was the only member of the Hulett family to retain a place on the Hulett board after the take-over which had ensued from actions taken by his cousin, "the brilliant, dynamic but difficult Guy Hulett",⁴² who had also been instrumental in effecting the company's vast expansion during the 1950s.

An impression is created above of the dynastic pattern which developed during the ascent of the sugarocratic families. It would be a distortion of historical fact to present the individuals encountered above as the sole agents of sugarocratic empire-building, for there were

⁴¹ Osborn, *Man of Purpose*. p.66.

⁴² *Financial Mail* 19.2.1965, Special Supplement, p.9.

numerous peripheral sugarocrats, company directors and others who were instrumental in the process.

The directorates of the companies forming the sugarocrats' empires did always, and in progressively greater magnitude, include persons from outside the immediate sugarocratic family network (see Appendix 1). There is admittedly little that can be said about the personal influence of individual directors in the absence of detailed information about their respective shareholdings and their standing on company boards, and without being privy to board decision-making. Certain generalisations may nevertheless be made on the basis of what information is available, and these cast light on the implications of the appointment of directors from outside the ranks of the sugarocracy.

Firstly, attention may be drawn to the directorships held by members of Natal's colonial elite on the earliest boards of the pre-eminent sugar companies. For example, Natal Estates had at different times S.F.Beningfield, G.C.Cato, R.Vause, Sir D.Currie, J.W.Leuchars, and G.Payne as directors; Umzinkulu had, also at different times, J.W.Leuchars, J.C.Maydon, A.Hepburn, and E.Acutt; and Chaka's Kraal had in its earlier years Governor B.C.C.Pine as a director. These people, who stood in the forefront of colonial Natal's urban elite, commanded considerable economic strength and wielded influence in local and colonial government. It can be deduced that however small their input might have been in the conduct of sugar company affairs, their association with colonial sugarmillers represented an alliance which served to emphasise the parallels between the objectives of government policy and company employment practices.

Secondly, the initial registration of some of Natal's sugar companies in

Britain and the raising of capital in Britain led to the presence of British residents on sugar company boards. The most notable of these overseas connections was made in 1929 when Sir L.Lyle, principal of England's vast Tate & Lyle sugar corporation, was appointed to the Hulett's board. The connection was maintained in the person of his son, who succeeded him as a director of Hulett's. The existence of such links pointed to another inestimable but implicitly important influence upon sugarmilling affairs in Natal.

Finally, there is the changing composition of directorates to be noted. Besides a reduction in the proportion of overseas directors in the wake of company re-registration in South Africa (to avoid double taxation) and local capital growth, growing investment diversification after World War II was followed by the progressive influx on those boards of administrative and technical managers from the various branches of company operations. That is not however necessarily to say that a managerial revolution was in progress. As departures were made in the post-World War II companies from the traditional omission of company employees from company boards, parent companies were simultaneously created above existing sugar companies. A related development was the increase in the number of interlocking directorships, with individual (usually sugarocratic) directors gaining seats on more than one sugar company board (See Appendix 1).

If it is accepted that company chairmen and managing directors are the most potent members of a directorate, then it follows that the sugarocracy did not lessen its grip on company control by admitting professional managers to its boards. These professional managers had to be seen as lieutenants of the sugarocracy rather than as contenders for

company control. Undoubtedly the most significant amongst this category of pre-1962 directors was Hulett's W.E.R. Edwards.⁴³ Edwards was born in Antigua in 1880 and he joined Hulett's in 1911 after a few years as a bank employee in Antigua, London and Port Elizabeth. When Hulsar (the origins of which are discussed in the following chapter) was floated in 1926 he was its first chairman, and he subsequently became Hulett's managing director. He was a central figure in pre-1927 negotiations between planters and millers, especially those which culminated in the 1926 Fahey Conference Agreement. Edwards also represented the local sugar industry as official delegate to the 1932 Ottawa Conference, which produced an agreement whereby South African sugar would be imported by Canada at the prevailing British preferential rate for an initial period of five years. He was also an unofficial adviser to the South African state delegation to the 1937 International Sugar Conference.

A consort of a different nature was the director who was neither foreign nor a professional manager. A case in point was L.C. Grice,⁴⁴ who at the time of his death in 1959 was chairman of the ZSM & P board and a director of Hulsar. He was a senior partner in Shepstone & Wiley, a firm of attorneys which he had joined in 1905. Besides his involvement with sugar companies, he was also chairman of James Brown Ltd. and Felt & Textiles South Africa Ltd., and director on the boards of over 30 other companies including Barclays Bank. There were few directors who, like Grice, were local people without roots in the sugar industry, and who had reached such stature in the sugar company boardroom before 1962.

It might readily be concluded from the foregoing that the entire Natal sugarocracy and its consorts within the industry made up a coterie of

⁴³ Biographical note condensed from SASJ 32:4(1948), p.235.

⁴⁴ Biographical note condensed from SASJ 43:8(1959), p.715.

sorts. This is dispelled in the following chapter which demonstrates that contending factions have always existed within the sugarocracy, and that its history is marked by campaigns in pursuit of sectional interests.

Summary

The opening decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a local sugarocracy composed of a few families from petit-bourgeois origins in Victorian Britain. As the more powerful of these sugarmilling families succeeded in their endeavour to constantly expand their capital in the means of sugar production, so were smaller sugarmillers gradually eliminated from the sphere of sugarmilling. Thus during its ascent as a bloc, the sugarocracy was continually contracting; a process of atomisation which approached a climactic end in the early 1960s.

Natal's "sugarocratic era" spanned six decades. Millers-cum-planters had begun emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century and individual members of certain sugarocratic families to-day still wield power in the sugar industry, but (as the following chapter shows in greater detail) it was between 1905 and 1962 that there was a sugarocracy *per se* in Natal. Eight family names accounted for the core of the sugarocracy; viz., Armstrong, Campbell, Crookes, Hulett, Pearce, Saunders, Smith, and Reynolds. A number of other families occupied peripheral positions in the world of sugarmilling, and a small group of company employees and directors completed the picture of sugar capital's human face during the sugarocratic era.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUGAROCRACY AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUGAR PRODUCTION

In charting the course followed by individual sugarocrats in their ascent, the previous chapter offered some indication of the economic factors which most immediately accounted for the way in which the plantation owner was eclipsed by the miller-cum-planter. Those insights into the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the Natal sugarocracy provide a prelude to a deeper examination of the history of the sugarocracy as a regional group of sugarmillers faced by local marketing constraints and stiff foreign competition.

It is necessary to undertake this deeper examination in order to appreciate the extent to which sugarmillers were influenced by international economic and political, to say nothing of environmental, forces. The way in which the sugarocracy responded to these forces ultimately, if not always immediately, had a bearing on its employment practices. Furthermore, by situating the Natal sugarocracy in its global context, similarities (and differences) between forms of sugarocratic control over workers in Natal and those exercised in other sugar-producing regions will be better understood.

There are four issues which receive particular attention in this chapter: firstly, competition and co-operation within the Natal sugarocracy; secondly, the sugarocracy's changing relationship with cane-growers; thirdly, the way in which local and international climatic and marketing conditions influenced sugarocratic practices; and fourthly, the events which led to the demise of the sugarocracy. The analysis begins with a brief historical outline of Natal's place in the

international sugar market. This outline serves as a skeletal structure to be fleshed out in the remainder of the chapter, where the main features of the political economy of sugar production in Natal since 1905 are dealt with chronologically, in four sections.

Natal and the International Sugar Market

Although Natal's sugar industry was founded during a remarkably favourable period for sugar sales,¹ the international situation was about to be transformed to the disadvantage of the colony's planters. It is generally argued that the downward trend in world sugar prices between the mid-1880s and World War I reflected the expansion of subsidised European beet sugar production and the disposal of beet sugar in protected markets. This, as has recently been pointed out,² was not the sole reason for declining prices. What is generally overlooked is that the production of cane increased more rapidly during the period of declining prices than it had previously been doing. These two factors implied the same thing for sugar-producers; namely, competition.

That Mauritius was, during the late 1800s, supplying sugar cheaply to the Cape Colony (where Natal annually disposed of approximately half of its sugar), meant that Natal's planters had to endure stiff competition in one of their most likely markets. Although both Deerr and Richardson have seen links between the mineral revolution on the South African highveld and the expansion of regional trading in Natal sugars,³ it is

¹ B.Albert and A.Graves, "Introduction". In **Crisis and Change in the International Sugar Economy 1860-1914**. Norwich and Edinburgh: ISC Press, 1984.

² **Ibid.**

³ N.Deerr, **The History of Sugar**. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, 1949, pp.191-192; and P.Richardson, "The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905: An Interpretative Essay", **Journal of African History** 23:4(1982), pp.515-527.

not absolutely clear from available evidence that Natal did indeed enjoy an immediate reprise. What is certain is that the Customs Convention signed in 1903, after the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War, brought a measure of security to Natal's planters by giving their product preference in the South African territories over Mauritian and other overseas sugars. If the 1903 Customs Convention had given strength to the arm of Natal's sugarmillers, they nevertheless later had to contend with the 1909 amendments to the 1901 **Modus Vivendi** between Moçambique and the Transvaal; one of the new provisions being that Moçambique could export commodities, including sugar, to the Transvaal duty-free. To be assured of survival in the remainder of the pre-World War I period, they had to participate in the contemporary revolution in sugar technology.⁴

Throughout World War I Natal planters were prohibited from exporting sugar, but there followed a recompense within a few years of the resumption of exports in 1919: with war damage having severely upset the beet sugar industries of Europe, world sugar prices rose to record levels by 1920 (as the South African economy was entering a 2-3 year recessionary period), and in 1923 the Moçambique Convention was terminated. However the initial euphoria of Natal's, and the world's, cane sugarmillers during the immediate post-war years was soon to give way to despair. By 1925 European beet-producers had recovered, while a number of cane-producing regions had expanded their output to take advantage of the post-war situation. Natal faced the resultant crisis of overproduction with a particularly large crop to dispose of. Prices on the free market dropped precipitously, and import competition on the

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, the following sketch has been based on H.I.Behrmann, "A Study of the Economics of Sugar-Cane Production in Natal". PhD thesis, University of Natal, 1959; **Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry of the Republic of South Africa**, 1970; and SASJ, *passim*.

South African market led the state to augment duties on foreign sugar. This was a foretaste of what the Great Depression was to bring.

When in 1930 world sugar prices plummeted again, Natal's sugarmillers were hard-hit. Since 1924 there had been a massive increase in the area under cane in Natal, and now its sugarmillers had to struggle against depressed export earnings as well as a malaria epidemic in their labour catchment area along the east coast. Moreover, in 1930 Cuba began "dumping" low-priced white sugar on the South African market. By raising the import duty in 1930 and again in 1932, after relatively low-priced American sugar entered the South African market, the South African state extended a measure of relief to Natal's sugar-producers. Matters were not made any easier for sugarmillers by the drop in domestic consumption during the depression. The first opportunity for Natal's sugarmillers to find cause for optimism came when, as a member of the 1933 Ottawa Imperial Economic Conference, South Africa secured a position on the Canadian market at a preferential tariff. Then, with the conclusion of the first International Sugar Agreement (ISA) in 1937, its signatories, including South Africa, established a firmer basis for guaranteeing access to the world market at determined prices by means of a quota system.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of the rapid expansion of the Natal sugar industry, and when South Africa became signatory to the 1951 Commonwealth Sugar Agreement (CSA) it did so as a relatively large producer. The CSA provided its predominantly colonial signatories with a protected market position and subsidised prices, and it fuelled the growth of local sugar industries in southern Africa (see Appendix 2). The terms of the CSA were incorporated in the second ISA, concluded in 1953.

These post-war international agreements amongst sugar-producers and their chief consumers in the European and North American metropolises were not the panacea for all the problems faced by the sugarmilling signatories. Since World War II, London sugar brokers C.Czarnikow have pointed out,⁵ world sugar prices have followed a six- and seven-year cyclical pattern. The first post-war boom came in 1956, when fears of stock depletion, in tandem with the Suez crisis, led to a doubling of the world sugar price. When a new ISA was signed in the wake of this boom, in 1958, South Africa again had its CSA terms embodied therein. However, when in 1961 South Africa became a Republic its international standing changed; its status as a CSA signatory was withdrawn and replaced by a bilateral agreement with Britain. South Africa's subsequent search for alternative foreign outlets led to Japan and, following its embargo on Cuban commodities, the United States. The Bay of Pigs crisis, which provoked this American action towards Cuba, had far-reaching effects in the world sugar market in the early part of 1962: the existing ISA was suspended, and the sugar price went into a severe depression. A relatively rapid recovery had been made by the end of 1962, and then by the end of 1963, after Cuba's sugar crop had suffered hurricane devastation, the sugar price had been pushed to record levels.

South Africa responded to the events surrounding the 1962/63 boom by removing restrictions on cane growing. The resultant expansion involved Natal's sugarmillers in a 4-year period of massive capital expenditure. However by 1965 the tide had turned again, largely as a result of Cuba's recovery, and the sugar price went into a decline as buyers took advantage of the over-stocked market.

⁵ Natal Mercury 8.7.1985.

The fourth post-war price boom occurred in 1969, the year in which the fourth ISA came into effect and re-introduced the structures of control which had been absent since the 1962 suspension. When attempts to negotiate a new ISA in 1973 failed, producers were poised to take unfettered advantage of the 1974 price boom. Participants on the world market were able to command prices which were in excess of fifty times greater than those which had prevailed during the 1965/66 slump. The fact that South African sugarmillers were selling sugar on the domestic market at less than production costs paled into insignificance against the background of huge export earnings.⁶

In 1976 overproduction again set the world sugar price on a downward slide, which continued until 1978. But now, a century after sugar beet had posed a serious threat to cane sugar, the price cycle embodied a new influence. This new threat is constituted by viable alternative sweeteners.

Millers-cum-Planters, the Refinery Question,
and Growers' Protests: 1905-1914

Given the narrow coastal region within which their capital was staked, the relatively brief period of settler colonialism that lay behind them, and the size of the settler population, it goes without saying that the early sugarocrats related one to another on a personal plane. If co-operative economic and political ventures were fostered by personal acquaintance, competition and conflict amongst sugarocrats were nevertheless prevalent. Superficially it was the Crookes', the Reynolds', and C.G.Smith who dominated sugarmilling on the coast to the south of Durban, while the Huletts and the Saunders' were the primary

⁶ Daily News 23.10.1974.

north coast sugarmillers. Although the regional groupings were not of themselves the sources of friction, some of the more important moments in the history of the sugarocracy arose out of collaborative or competitive efforts to exploit or break down certain regional advantages.

Zululand had been annexed to Natal in 1897, but pressure from sugarmillers, amongst others, to allow Natal capital to spread into the territory was resisted for some years by the Colonial Government. When Zululand was opened to settler colonists, the young sugarocracy was presented with an opportunity to compete, by tender, for the erection of a central sugarmill there. This was to be a central sugarmill in the pure sense of the term, with its owner prevented from also owning the lands that would supply it with cane. The sugarmiller would be contractually bound to crush cane planted by land concessionaires, who would be bound under the government's scheme to cultivate cane and supply it to the sugarmill.

Tenders were first invited by the Colonial Government in mid-1904, but as J.L.Hulett was the only one to respond before the dead-line, the government re-advertised. A tender was attracted from Friend Addison this time. Although the Select Committee appointed to assess the tenders favoured Addison's, neither his nor Hulett's were acceptable because they embodied certain financial expectations of the government. In mid-1905 the government extended another invitation for tenders. Three offers were forthcoming: one from Hulett, one from E.Saunders, C.P.Reynolds, and C.G.Smith, and the third from an un-named party. In August 1905 it was confirmed that Hulett had been successful, and he set

about the establishment of the Amatikulu sugarmill.⁷

It is not clear why other sugarmillers had not initially shown the same enthusiasm as Hulett, but the recent depression may have been an influential factor. When the final tenders were submitted, the one from Saunders, Reynolds, and Smith reflected the links that existed between the three sugarocrats; an association with formidable potential which was never realised. It is of speculative interest to ponder the absence of Marshall Campbell from this latter group, given the bonds that existed between the Campbells and the Saunders'. It has been claimed that Campbell was himself intent on making a bid for the Amatikulu concession, but that *en route* to Pietermaritzburg the train, which also carried Hulett with his tender, was delayed and Campbell was unable to submit his tender on time. Hulett had apparently alighted from the train, made off across the veld, and managed to hire a horse and cart which took him to Pietermaritzburg timeously.⁸ The final contest for the first Zululand concession sugarmill had demonstrated the capacity which sugarocrats had to form coalitions, as much as it showed them to be competitive; it was an event which foreshadowed later negotiations involving sugarocrats in various coalitions. There were certain groupings which endured, but each multi-party negotiation or conflict within the sugarocracy seemed to bring out a fresh coalition, as in the case of refining arrangements.

Whereas uneven quality had previously characterised the sugar produced by the various sugarmills of Natal, 1910 saw the origins of wider uniformity as co-operative refining was first introduced by some of the

⁷ For details on the Zululand concessions see *NLA, Sessional Paper*, 4, 1906; *Natal Government Gazette* 27.6.1905; 'Umfolozi 1923-1973'; TAD, K39, Vol.5, SC34; and SASJ 33:3(1949), pp.157-161.

⁸ N.Herd, *Killie's Africa: The Achievements of Dr. Killie Campbell*. Pietermaritzburg: Blue Crane Books, 1982, p.36.

sugar companies. Natal Estates, Tongaat, and Hulett's were the major investors and sugar suppliers behind the scheme which brought into being the South African Sugar Refinery Ltd.. The newly-formed company had its refinery at South Coast Junction, and its first managing director was Edward Saunders. This development enabled the participants to achieve greater rationalisation in the areas of production and marketing.

If three of the largest sugarmillers were now enjoying the benefits of co-operative refining, they and the sugarocracy as a whole had not resolved their differences with suppliers. They were reticent, secretive, and calculating in dealings with their cane suppliers, notwithstanding joint interests. Until the mid-1930s cane was paid for by weight rather than sucrose quantity; a system which had nourished antipathy between grower and miller since the appearance of the first centralised sugarmills in Natal. Indeed, as early as 1885 independent growers had voiced their concern about the secretive way in which the millers-cum-planters functioned.⁹ Information about levels of sugar recovery was concealed, and the miller-cum-planter kept an upper hand in cane pricing. There was no knowing what the quality of cane was, how one supplier's crop compared with another's, how one sugarmill's level of efficiency compared with that of another, and whether any improvements in sugar recovery were being effected. Because sugarmillers justified payment by weight on the grounds that only one cane variety was grown in Natal,¹⁰ while also keeping details about their operations and revenue out of the public eye, growers had well-founded suspicions that they were being disadvantageously paid and misled.

⁹ W.Y.Campbell, *The Natal Sugar Industry*. Durban: P.Davis & Sons, 1885, p.57.

¹⁰ G.Heaton Nicholls, *South Africa in My Time*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1961, p.101.

New light was cast upon growers' suspicions when some of them in Zululand litigated, following proved irregularities by concession sugarmills.¹¹ The ensuing Beaumont Award, made in favour of the growers in 1912, might be said to have been the harbinger of greater regularity in miller/grower relations on the whole. Seen from Osborn's perspective, after 1910 "the sugar industry, with conscious effort, started to put its house in order...nudged along by two commissions of enquiry...[and] the development of enquiring minds and fearless self-analysis".¹² A closer examination of the affairs of the inter-war period reveals that self-interest would have been a more apt diagnosis than the "self-analysis" found by Osborn.

The Sugarocracy Fights through the Inter-War Period: 1914-late 1930s

Since the beginning of World War I domestic sugar prices had been fixed and sugar exports were prohibited, and for some years there had been no British imperial preference for colonial sugars. It was in this context that Natal sugarmillers joined ranks with other industrialists to advance protectionism by lobbying through the newly-formed British Empire Producers' Organisation (BEPO) and, as the next chapter shows, the Federated Chamber of Industries (FCI). Some sugarmillers were at

¹¹ R.F.Osborn, **Valiant Harvest: The Founding of the South African Sugar Industry 1848-1926**. Durban: SASA, 1964, p.102. There would be further court decisions in favour of concession growers, such as the 1919 award to plaintiff in van der Plank vs. Hulett's: **SASJ** 3:10(1919), p.947.

¹² Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**. pp.101-102.

the same time motivated to buy into the Moçambique sugar industry.¹³

The 1918 Cost of Living Commission indicated that respite was on its way when it concluded that the sugar industry should be allowed to resume exporting. However, rather than sitting back in expectation of favourable market conditions, sugarmillers sustained their collective commitment to the work of the organisations which they had helped to launch, namely BEPO, FCI, and the South African Sugar Association (SASA). Although the FCI constituted an important lobbying institution, its direct involvement in the economics and politics of sugar production and distribution was negligible as compared to that of BEPO and, naturally, SASA. Broadly conceived by E.Saunders as a propaganda agency for imperial producers and founded in London in 1916, BEPO was to represent an important vehicle for advancing the cause of Natal's sugar exporters in particular. In 1918 South Africa's sugarmillers pledged their material support for BEPO over the following three years,¹⁴ and both Saunders and W.E.R.Edwards served terms as BEPO executives.¹⁵ On

¹³ In 1914 Illovo Sugar Estates acquired the Beira Sugar Estates in Moçambique, and in 1917 C.G.Smith took it (now the Beira-Illovo Sugar Estates) over in his own name. Smith disposed of his Moçambique interests in 1920 (R.F.Osborn, **C.G.: A Great Natalian: A Biography of Sir Charles George Smith**. Durban: C.G.Smith, 1966; and D.Lincoln, "Capital and the Milling of Sugar in Moçambique before 1942", **Perspectives in Economic History** 1(1982), pp.30-42). At the same time, and until the late 1920s, other Natalians, namely Gen.Arnett, G.Crookes, W.F.Curry, R.Murray, and C.Platt, were the directors of African Agricultural Estates, another sugarmilling company in Moçambique (**SASJ** 6:3(1922), pp.181-183). The company was floated in 1910 and registered in Natal. In 1915 the South African government was approached indirectly to support the company's bid to raise more capital in Britain (TAD, MNW 295, MM 2487/15, Secretary African Agricultural Estates to Mackenzie, 1915). The company would seem to have been sold in 1927 to a Mauritian syndicate (**SASJ** 11:4(1927), p.227). Whether or not Natal sugarmillers were involved in the Inhambane Sugar Estates, registered in Johannesburg in 1903 (TAD, LD 374, AG 1237/03, Registration of Articles of Association), is unknown. Of related interest was the move made in 1927 when G.S.Armstrong led a syndicate including C.Platt and Gen.Wylie that was investing in Southern Rhodesia (**SASJ** 11:12(1927), p.775).

¹⁴ **SASJ** 2:3(1918), p.1072.

¹⁵ **SASJ** 15:3(1931), p.155.

the London end, Sir Humphrey Leggett was the Natal sugar industry's permanent representative on the BEPO Council.

The most important organisation to emerge at this crucial historical moment was SASA, which was formed in 1919 as a combined millers' and growers' association.¹⁶ It in fact represented the victory of sugarmillers in bringing the two parties together to jointly resist state interference in the sugar industry while simultaneously promoting the cause of protectionism in the face of a deteriorating world sugar market. It very soon became obvious that SASA provided nothing more than a fragile unity based on compromise and pragmatism. Growers were from the start reluctant partners with misgivings about, *inter alia*, the envisaged tripartite structure of SASA to accommodate sugar agents/brokers as well as themselves and millers.¹⁷ The close affiliations between sugarmillers and their distributors had for decades been a major bone of contention for growers. In the event, the agent David Fowler was elected SASA's first chairman,¹⁸ and E.Saunders, who had been the prime mover behind its formation, SASA's first president.

The elaborate institutional structure erected by the sugarocracy during and immediately after the critical World War I period, was to become fully mobilised in an attempt to take full advantage of the conditions which the 1918 Cost of Living Commission had anticipated. During 1919, the export of surplus sugar was again allowed, under licence; a joint miller/grower deputation to Cape Town resulted in the government raising the domestic price of sugar; and the BEPO campaign to have the imperial

¹⁶ On the stormy inception of SASA see Duminy, "Natal Sugar Interest", and A.Hammond *et al* **South African Cane Growers' Association: The First 50 Years**. Durban: SACGA, 1972.

¹⁷ See discussion in *SASJ* 3:5(1919), p.319.

¹⁸ Although Fowler did belong to the syndicate which owned the La Mercy sugar company between 1920 and 1931, his primary interest was in sugar marketing.

preference for colonial sugars renewed also achieved a degree of success. Then in August 1919, with world sugar prices having risen threefold in the previous three months, another deputation met Smuts in Durban over the price at which sugar was being sold on the domestic market (the demands of which had to be satisfied before sugarmillers could export). Yet another miller/grower deputation travelled to Pretoria in September. When the Cabinet responded by increasing the domestic sugar price again, the palliative measure fell short of sugar producers' requests, and it came with no guarantees. This has been seen as the impetus for E.Saunders to stand for election to parliament in 1920.¹⁹ The strengthened sugar lobby (with Saunders and Heaton Nicholls of Umfolozi in the House of Assembly and F.Reynolds in the Senate), and another sugar deputation to Cape Town, won for sugar producers two further price increases in 1920.²⁰

Still frustrated by the price ceilings, and perturbed by the possible imminent renewal of the Moçambique Convention, which would allow Moçambique to continue exporting duty-free sugar to the Transvaal, sugar industry representatives again went to Cape Town in April 1921, but to no avail. Not surprisingly, after two price reductions were announced later in that year, the Prime Minister was visited by a sugar industry deputation. The upshot of this last meeting was the government's decision to appoint a Commission of Inquiry into the sugar industry.²¹

Although after World War I the Union Government under the South Africa Party generally provided a protective dispensation for agricultural and manufacturing interests, policies which directly favoured sugarmillers

¹⁹ A.H.Duminy, "The 'Natal Sugar Interest' and the Smuts Government, 1919-1924", unpublished mimeo.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See Behrmann, "Economics of Cane Production", pp.32-69.

did not necessarily accommodate their supplying growers. Evidence given before the 1922 Sugar Inquiry Commission left little doubt as to the difficulties that lay ahead of growers, who were intent on achieving a more equitable share of the proceeds from sugar sales.²² One witness supplied evidence to the Commission showing accounting and distribution inconsistencies on the part of Hulett's. (Interestingly, the letter submitted as evidence was withheld from SASA.)²³ Certain of the evidence and data submitted to the Commission by Hulett's were, at the express behest of the company, kept from the eyes of growers.²⁴ Crookes Bros., who had no contracts with growers, revealed that they had as their basis of cane payment 12/- per ton when their sugar realised £15 per ton, less excise duty. Otherwise they had only a skeletal return to submit to the Commission, on the grounds that they had never undertaken costing nor kept separate accounts for fields and sugarmill, and they had no chemists' figures available.²⁵

The Crookes Bros.' return, and data furnished by Natal Estates and Tongaat, respectively, have provided an insight into the nature of the prevailing variation and variability in miller/grower trade. This is illustrated in Table 1. (The mutual interdependence of concession growers and millers was at some remove from the situation which prevailed south of the Tugela, and besides showing the various, and fluctuating, prices paid to growers, the tabulated data are indicative of the differences in status that existed between concession growers in Zululand and growers supplying these three particular sugarmills.)

²² It is notable that Hulett's and their cane suppliers in Zululand were frequently locked in battle during the inter-war period. Growers found Hulett's to be impassive when negotiation was attempted. See TAD, K39, Vol.5, Memorandum from Ginginhlovu and Mtunzini Planters' Association to members, 24.8.1918.

²³ TAD, K39, Vol.5, W.White to Sugar Commission Secretary, 28.2.1922.

²⁴ TAD, K39, Vol.5, Sugar Commission Chairman to Hulett's, 22.2.1922.

²⁵ TAD, K39, Vol.5, Crookes Bros. to Sugar Commission, 23.2.1922.

TABLE 1: GROWERS' CANE SUPPLIES TO THREE NATAL SUGAR COMPANIES, 1912-1920

	GROWERS' CANES AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL CRUSHED (PERCENTAGES)			PAID TO GROWERS (SHILLINGS PER TON)		
	Natal Estates	Tongaat	Crookes Bros	Natal Estates	Tongaat	Crookes Bros
1912/13	13,38	20,88	40,27	12/3	12/9	11/11
1913/14	11,63	24,26	36,65	12/6	12/5	12/7
1914/15	12,07	27,02	48,56	13/6	13/11	14/6
1915/16	14,41	31,71	46,69	14/10	15/2 ¹ / ₄	14/9
1916/17	13,37	36,29	48,88	15/9	16/5 ³ / ₄	15/9
1917/18	14,18	39,58	46,12	19/7	18/11 ³ / ₈	19/2
1918/19	30,20	53,45	45,99	17/4 ³ / ₄	17/5 ¹ / ₂	17/9
1919/20	26,45	45,56	45,20	22/9 ¹ / ₄	19/11 ¹ / ₃	20/6
1920/21	24,00		53,33	36/-		34/-

Source: TAD, K39, Vol 5, Company Submissions to Sugar Inquiry Commission, 1922.

The findings of the 1922 Commission were hardly prejudicial to sugarmillers, but some of its more important recommendations indicated that the miller/grower **status quo** would duly be revised. It was recommended, **inter alia**, that cane in future be paid for according to sucrose content and quality, and not by weight; that the Zululand concession agreements be immediately revised, and their period of operation reduced from 25 to 5 years; and that planters should have access to information about the performance of sugarmills.²⁶

After the Sugar Inquiry Commission, cane growers generally remained sceptical of sugarmillers. With the world sugar market still buoyant in the early 1920s huge profits were being reaped in the sugar industry,²⁷

²⁶ See Behrmann, "Economics of Cane Production", p.33.

²⁷ An un-named company, possibly Hulett's, rose from a 20% loss to a 32% profit between 1921/2 and 1922/3, to a 125% profit the following season (Board of Trade and Industries, Report N^o 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry**, 1926).

but because no changes to their situation had come of the 1922 Commission, growers remained convinced that millers were taking an unjustifiably large slice of those profits. The **African Sugar and Cotton Planter** articulated growers' views thus: "We want more light thrown in the dark places, a more efficient policy of administration, and the discontinuance of the system of family-party cabals".²⁸

When the world sugar crisis struck in 1925, South Africa had produced a particularly large crop and sugar producers turned immediately to the government for assistance. The Board of Trade and Industries investigation which was consequently undertaken, led to the recommendation being made that the duty on imported sugar be raised as a protective measure, subject to certain conditions. One of these conditions was that the miller/grower agreements be revised to effect payment for cane according to its sucrose content; this was in pursuance of recommendations already made by the 1922 Commission, which had not yet been adopted.²⁹ The duly instituted conference of millers and growers, under the chairmanship of Fahey (who belonged to the Labour Party and was chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries), produced the Fahey Agreement on cane pricing according to its sucrose content, and attendant legislation in the form of the 1926 Sugar Prices Act.

The ink had barely dried on the Fahey Conference Agreement before the sugarmillers began expanding their own crop sizes on an unprecedented scale. They also began an immediate revision of refining arrangements. Watson has revealed part of the background to the events which led to the liquidation of the South African Sugar Refinery after a brief life

²⁸ **African Sugar and Cotton Planter** 1(1925), p.11.

²⁹ Board of Trade and Industries, Report No. 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry**, 1926.

of fifteen years.³⁰ Although he had been on the Tongaat board of directors since 1902, C.G.Smith had not participated in the co-operative refinery movement during 1910. His subsequent resignation from the Tongaat board followed a dispute which he had instigated by questioning the methods of management employed by the refinery's directors. The difference between Smith and the co-operative refiners had thus foreclosed the possibility of industry-wide rationalisation.

Then Natal Estates had effectively reversed its commitment to the co-operative refinery by taking the decision to introduce to its sugarmill the double carbonatation refining process. This move by Natal Estates apparently incited Hulett's, under the hand of W.E.R.Edwards, to build a new central refinery a few hundred metres away from the existing South African Sugar Refinery plant. The older refining company was consequently liquidated, and in 1927 a new company, Hulett's South African Refineries Ltd. (Hulsar), began operations as co-operative refiners and distributors. Hulsar, which served a number of the north coast sugarmills, had as its main shareholders Sir J.L.Hulett and Sons, Tongaat, and ZSM & P. Meanwhile a suchar process refinery was installed at Illovo in 1927, and all the south coast sugarmills stayed outside the Hulsar scheme.

Although the settlement of the refinery question in the above fashion may have reflected their inability to achieve consensus over the techniques and management of refining, sugarmillers were quite prepared to combine forces and rationalise the system of selling their exported sugar in London. Until 1927 sugarmillers had effected the distribution of sugar exported to Britain through various agents and brokers (Table

³⁰ R.G.T.Watson, *Tongaati: An African Experiment*. London: Hutchinson, 1960, p.132.

2 reflects the situation as it was in the early 1920s), and the only unifying factor was the presence in London of their collective representative, Sir Humphrey Leggett, who could proudly announce to them that

in addition to their [BEPO's] sugar committee, on which I sit, they have appointed a very strong new committee, frankly styled "The Propaganda Committee"...They have paid me the compliment of making me Chairman of this Committee, and I shall of course, do my best in that capacity for the interests of South African sugar.³¹

The Smith group depended upon the agency founded by C.G.Smith before he became a sugarmiller, while Hulett's had of late performed their own distribution, and A.A.Smith and David Fowler & Co. were two other important agencies. The last-named company had become a leading export agency, selling Natal sugars through the London brokers E.D. & F.Man or, less frequently, Czarnikow. At the end of the 1927/28 season, the first during which Hulsar functioned, its chairman, Edwards, communicated to C.G.Smith and Co. his satisfaction with their chosen selling agents in London, and his concern that C.G.Smith should also deal through African Agency Ltd. so as to avoid mutually detrimental dealings. The following season saw C.G.Smith and Co. following the advice received from Edwards.³²

The new system worked as follows: after the determination of export quotas by the Crop Disposal Committee of the Natal Sugar Millers' Association (NSMA), Hulsar, and C.G.Smith and Co. would jointly agree upon their respective shares of the export sugar cargo and organise its shipment to Britain. African Agencies then acted as intermediary between the two South African concerns and British refiners and brokers. This arrangement involved Hulsar working as agent under agreement with

³¹ SASJ 10:11(1926), pp.758-759.

³² KC, F633 SOU, South African Sugar Association, "Private and Confidential Statements and Correspondence of E.Saunders and W.E.R.Edwards", August 1934.

TABLE 2: QUANTITY OF SUGAR HANDLED BY AGENCIES, 1919/20-1921/22
(SHOWN AS PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL PRODUCTION)

	1919/20	1920/21	1921/22
David Fowler & Co Hulett's (4 sugarmills) Natal Estates Tongaat Delville La Mercy	52,51	52,97	48,75
C G Smith & Co Reynolds (2 sugarmills) Illovo Crookes Umzinkulu Chaka's Kraal Addison Hawksworth	27,97	24,47	28,55
A A Smith Wilkinson Z S M Armstrong Chick	11,03	13,26	12,00
Independent Glendale Kirkman Melville Stewart Platt St Lucia	8,48	9,30	10,69

Source: TAD, K39, Vol 5, Submission to Sugar Inquiry Commission, 1922.

Hulett's, Tongaat, Natal Estates, ZSM & P, Melville, Prospecton, Central Factory, and Umfolozi Co-op.. C.G.Smith was the agency for Reynolds Bros., Crookes Bros., Chaka's Kraal, Illovo, Gledhow, and Umzinkulu.³³ Thus by World War II the handling of Natal's sugar exports had undergone extensive revision, stemming largely out of the Hulsar initiative.

If they had reached agreement amongst themselves on the marketing of sugar exports, the sugarocrats had still to contend with the problem of protesting growers, many of whom had not been placated by the terms of the Fahey Agreement. As revolutionary as it had been in the Natal context, the Fahey Agreement did not eliminate the discord between the two parties, and an unconditional rapprochement was far from being reached. From the outset there was abundant prejudice, shown in the refusal of sixteen growers to sign the agreement.³⁴ No less mollifying were breaches of the agreement. It was shown that as a result of the averaging of statistics by Hulett's Felixton chemists in 1928, growers had incurred losses, and for these and the costs of arbitration they were compensated in 1930.³⁵ Given that at least two further cases were brought against Hulett's,³⁶ and, more significantly, that the South African Cane Growers' Association (SACGA) split from SASA, 1930 was a particularly turbulent year. Such turbulence in the sugar industry was undoubtedly related to the fact that the Fahey Agreement favoured millers-cum-planters.

The miller/grower relationship was further complicated by the difference in status between concession growers and non-concession growers. The negotiating strength of the latter growers was surely undermined by the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Board of Trade and Industries, Report No 194, **The Sugar Industry: Working of Sugar Conference Agreement and Future Organization**, 1935.

³⁵ SASJ 14:5(1930), p.303.

³⁶ SASJ 14:2(1930), p.85, and 14:10(1930), p.667.

particular conditions facing each "mill group", by their proportionately minor status as suppliers, and not infrequently by close family ties with sugarmillers. These differences had provided much of the rationale for the existence of two major growers' organisations, the Zululand Planters' Union (ZPU) and the Natal Planters' Union (NPU). There is little known about the nature of relations between south coast growers and the millers constituting the Smith group. On the north coast, between Durban and the Tugela river, the sorts of stresses that typified miller/grower relations in Zululand were ameliorated, if not contained, by social connections of long standing. The importance of sugarocrats' intermingling with north coast growers was demonstrated in the events surrounding and following the Fahey Agreement. Even if things did not always follow the sugarocrats' line, their intermingling with north coast growers appears to have reduced dissent amongst these suppliers in the wake of the Fahey Agreement.

A number of growers' associations were formed in the two or three years following the Fahey Agreement. One of these, the Tinley Manor Planters' Association, was dominated by members of the Armstrong and Hulett families.³⁷ In the Tongaat district sugarocratic families were numerically less prominent within the planting community, but hardly less influential. During October 1926 the growers supplying Tongaat Sugar Co. had met at the company office to have E.Saunders explain to them the Fahey Agreement. These growers then formed an association and elected a committee which decided to employ their own chemist, who was instructed to have nothing to do with the head technologist of the South African Sugar Planters' Union (SASPU); they thereby remained outside the SASPU ambit. The Tongaat Sugar Planters' Association subsequently refused to join SASPU's successor, the SACGA, but were later convinced

³⁷ SASJ 62:9(1978), p.447.

to do so by other growers following a formal proposal seconded by D.Saunders. In 1931 the association was renamed Tongaat and Central Factory Planters' Association.³⁸ Such amalgamation came as a result of centralisation of ownership and production in the industry, and it was of some concern to the SACGA that in the early 1930s many growers were selling up, and that millers were ready buyers for their farms.³⁹ Thus was the Inanda Planters' Association rendered defunct when Natal Estates and Tongaat respectively bought a number of large sugar farms.⁴⁰

North of the Tugela the situation was quite different. In Zululand, Amatikulu and Felixton were large concession sugarmills, both owned by Hulett's and both supplied solely by concession growers. Delville and ZSM were not concession sugarmills, and Umfolozi was (since 1923) a growers' co-operative sugarmill. The Ginginhlovu and Mtunzini Planters' Association, representing Amatikulu's suppliers, was consistently frustrated in its attempts to persuade Hulett's to adapt concession agreements and make them more mutually acceptable. These endeavours were spearheaded by the association's president, C.B.Hill, a vociferous campaigner for growers' interests who had in the broader political arena been a staunch and active supporter of Gen. Botha's.⁴¹ Felixton's growers had F.Piccione as a stalwart defendant of their interests; he considered millers to have treated concession growers as "a lot of indentured Indians".⁴² Outstanding amongst Zululand growers in their struggle against millers was G.Heaton Nicholls of Umfolozi.

A thorn in the flesh of the sugarocracy, Heaton Nicholls worked relentlessly to improve the position of Zululand growers and in so doing

³⁸ SASJ 61:7(1977), pp.349-351.

³⁹ SASJ 15:2(1931), pp.103-115, and 15:10(1931), p.630.

⁴⁰ SASJ 16:10(1932), pp.557-561.

⁴¹ SASJ 3:2(1919), p.135.

⁴² SASJ 1:2(1917), pp.131-134.

he became a champion of growers' interests in general. His role as growers' protagonist is suitably described in an excerpt from a speech of his:

They [the Zululand concession agreements] stood in the way of efficiency. To accomplish this it was necessary to organize all planters to enlist the aid of Government. That meant organizing the planters south of the Tugela, where the Government agreements did not apply...There was in existence at Umhlali an Association called the Victoria County Farmers' Association, which was a very mixed bag. At my first meeting I was faced by the principal miller of the district who told the members that I was a socialist and some-what out of bounds in Umhlali; but it was not long before Umhlali formed the strongest centre in Natal. I travelled down the South Coast and stirred up considerable interest. The result was the formation of the Natal Planters' Union, with Townsend as its first President, from which it was a short step to affiliate Zululand and Natal into the South African Planters' Union - now the Cane Growers' Association. As its first President, I was in a position to speak, through the Executive, on behalf of all sugar planters to the Government. The objective was the revision of the Zululand agreements.⁴³

The sugarocracy could not have found a more astute opponent. Heaton Nicholls had a background in British colonial administration, having served as a district commissioner in Northern Rhodesia and magistrate in British New Guinea, and he was destined for high office. In the interim he carried the growers' torch, after first having openly parted company with the sugarocracy in 1921.⁴⁴ His twin concerns were to obtain government intervention on behalf of growers, and to have the Zululand agreements revised. There can be little doubt as to his having played a direct part in bringing about through articles in the media, through parliament, through his submission to the 1922 Commission,⁴⁵ and through

⁴³ "Opening Address", **Proceedings, SASTA** 22(1948). See also Heaton Nicholls, **South Africa**, which provides details of his political career.

⁴⁴ TAD, K39, Vol.3, Heaton Nicholls to Sugar Commission Chairman, 20.4.1922.

⁴⁵ Duminy, "Natal Sugar Interest".

sugar producers' organisations, the breakdown of sugarcroatic hegemony in the miller/grower relationship in the mid-1930s.

Shortly before the expiry of the terms of the Fahey Agreement, another investigation was made by the Board of Trade and Industries, and its report formed the basis for a new agreement, the terms of which were laid out in the 1936 Sugar Act. While its autonomy from the state was preserved, the sugar industry was compelled to adopt a new formula for cane pricing - the "marginal formula" - which made provision for costs of production by growers and millers respectively. The Act also laid the basis for the introduction of quotas and the establishment of a Sugar Industry Central Board. Growers would henceforth be awarded quotas according to which they would supply specified quantities of cane to specific sugarmills. The Central Board, upon which millers and growers would have equal representation, was designed to administer the quota system, to operate a cane testing service at all sugarmills, and generally to watch over the miller/grower relationship.

It was thus not until 1936 that stability, if not accord, was reached between sugarmillers and independent growers, and SASA was reconstituted as a millers' and growers' association. Brief bursts of united action before that time were overshadowed by planters' intolerance of a situation which investigation after investigation had shown to be based on a questionable cane-payment system. Growers' discontent had been aggravated by the absence of any form of accountability by sugarmillers; over and above the inequitable returns on cane paid for by weight, the method bred disincentives for growers, and there was no way of their knowing if cane was being processed under conditions of optimal efficiency. Sugarmillers had obviously taken no steps to dispell the view that they had been acting conspiratorially; that was their

prerogative so long as they enjoyed supremacy in the sugar industry. When the initiative had been taken by sugarmillers to form a united front with growers, it had to be seen as one that was implicitly founded on a division between production aspects and distribution aspects: sugarmillers sought co-operation if it could lead to mercantile protection, but they were extremely defensive about production details, to the extent of even denying one another access to information about production.

Centralisation and Consolidation of Sugarmill Ownership: late 1930s-1962

The coalescence of sugarmillers' interests in refining and marketing sugar had stimulated collective sugarocratic ventures, but there continued unabated attempts by respective sugarocrats to expand their capital in the means of sugar production. They eliminated peripheral sugarmillers in this pursuit, their expansionist ambitions took them beyond South Africa's borders, and they inevitably pitted themselves one against the other. An examination of the ensuing centralisation and consolidation of sugarmill ownership completes the picture of the sugarocracy ascendant.

The 1936 Sugar Act had been intended, *inter alia*, to restrict the country's sugar output by means of a quota system. The terms of the Sugar Act were reinforced by the 1937 ISA, which also embodied a quota system. The implementation of the restrictions was not unproblematic and, with the strong demand for Commonwealth sugars during the War, there was good reason for amendments to be made to the Act during 1939. Further negotiation in 1943 between producers and the state led to the inception of the system whereby cane delivered at the sugarmill was

weighed on the basis of its sucrose content for the purposes of quota determination.

By 1946 the situation of the sugarmillers had captured the special attention of certain Senators and state officials. Although the state's interest centred primarily on the question of settling more people on agricultural land (and to this end the Ministry of Lands was advancing the idea of developing a new sugar-producing region at Pongola), strong opinions were voiced against the sugarocracy during Senate debates on the matter. As one Senator put it:

The sugar industry of Natal is one which has been inimical to the welfare of the people of South Africa, because not only...has it brought into that industry people whom we are having a good deal of trouble with - and it will be never-ending now - but they will have also...held this country up to ransom.⁴⁶

Citing a former Wage Board chairman, he went on to make the condemnatory claim that if every employee in the sugar industry was paid a monthly pension of £25 and sugar was imported rather than produced by South Africa, it would constitute less of a burden to the country's economy than existing subsidies did.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, when in 1947 the state instituted measures to raise South Africa's food output, the sugar industry was given the green light to expand. The area of land under sugar cane had remained static during the War, but now quota regulations were amended and greater output encouraged.⁴⁸

It was against this background that the post-war centralisation of sugar capital began to intensify. In 1952 Reynolds Bros.' Esperanza sugarmill

⁴⁶ *Senate Debates*, 4.4.1946, cols.962-966

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry of the Republic of South Africa*, 1970.

was relocated to Pongola, in the new sugarcane-growing region in the eastern Transvaal, where it began production in 1954. The take-over of ZSM & P by Hulett's in 1957, had also gained for Hulett's the lion's share of Hulsar. It was also during 1957 that the first thrust was made by the Natal sugarocracy into foreign regions without existing sugar industries. This expansion took place in a buoyant sugar market some few years after the CSA had provided for quotas to be given to Commonwealth producers. Under the lead of Guy Hulett, Hulett's had in 1957 bought the Triangle sugarmill and estates in Southern Rhodesia. Its attempt to establish a sugarmilling company in Tanganyika that year was thwarted by the refusal of that country's government to commit itself to the building of necessary railways, and Nguru Estates in Tanganyika, which Hulett's had bought in anticipation, were subsequently sold.⁴⁹ Guy Hulett then turned his attention to Swaziland, immediately beginning negotiations with the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC). In 1958 the negotiations bore fruit in the form of Mhlume (Swaziland) Sugar Co., a joint venture between Hulett's and CDC which milled its first crop in 1960.⁵⁰

Sugarmillers suffered a temporary set-back when world sugar prices fell sharply during the 1960-61 season. The severity of the price slump and growing concern with their own vulnerability in such circumstances prompted the larger sugar companies to embark on a programme of capital diversification.⁵¹ The spawning of subsidiaries had hardly begun when, just as the international sugar economy entered its next boom period, the parent companies became embroiled in a complex series of tactics and counter-tactics at the end of which the almost complete monopolisation

⁴⁹ Hulett's Annual General Meeting Reports, in *SASJ* 39:10(1955), 40:10(1956), 41:10(1957), and 42:10(1958).

⁵⁰ See Appendix 2.

⁵¹ See for example *South African Sugar Year Book* (1963-64), pp.65-67.

of sugarmilling had been achieved. Osborn has chronicled the events in close detail and his work provides the source for the following summary of events.⁵²

The background to the restructuring of sugar capital in 1962 could be traced to Natal Estates' attempts to effect the rationalisation of its milling and refining operations. Large quantities of cane destined for the Natal Estates' sugarmill at Mount Edgecombe had for a number of years been cut in fields which fell into Hulett's catchment areas. The economic irrationality of its cane supply system indicated the desirability of entering into a co-operative agreement with either Hulett's or Tongaat. Any negotiation would be complicated by the fact that Natal Estates had invested R 1,5 million to improve its refining plant to a standard which would permit the production of sugar of equal quality to that produced by Hulsar. Natal Estates had also dismissed Hulsar as its selling agent in favour of C.G.Smith & Co.. This critical situation was brought to a head in mid-October 1962 when Guy Hulett, Hulett's chairman, notified his Natal Estates counterpart that Hulett's was to make an offer for the purchase of all Natal Estates shares. The Natal Estates directorate turned immediately to the Tongaat board for consultation. A meeting was called, and on the same day that it took place an indication came from G.V.Crookes that the Smith Group would stand behind Tongaat in whatever action that company saw fit to initiate. As a consequence of Tongaat's reaction to this supportive move, a consortium of Tongaat and the Smith Group was established to negotiate the future of Natal Estates. Although the consortium made a counter-bid for the Natal Estates shares, they were beaten by Guy Hulett who announced in late October that he had secured for his company a

⁵² Osborn, *Great Natalian*. pp.108-112.

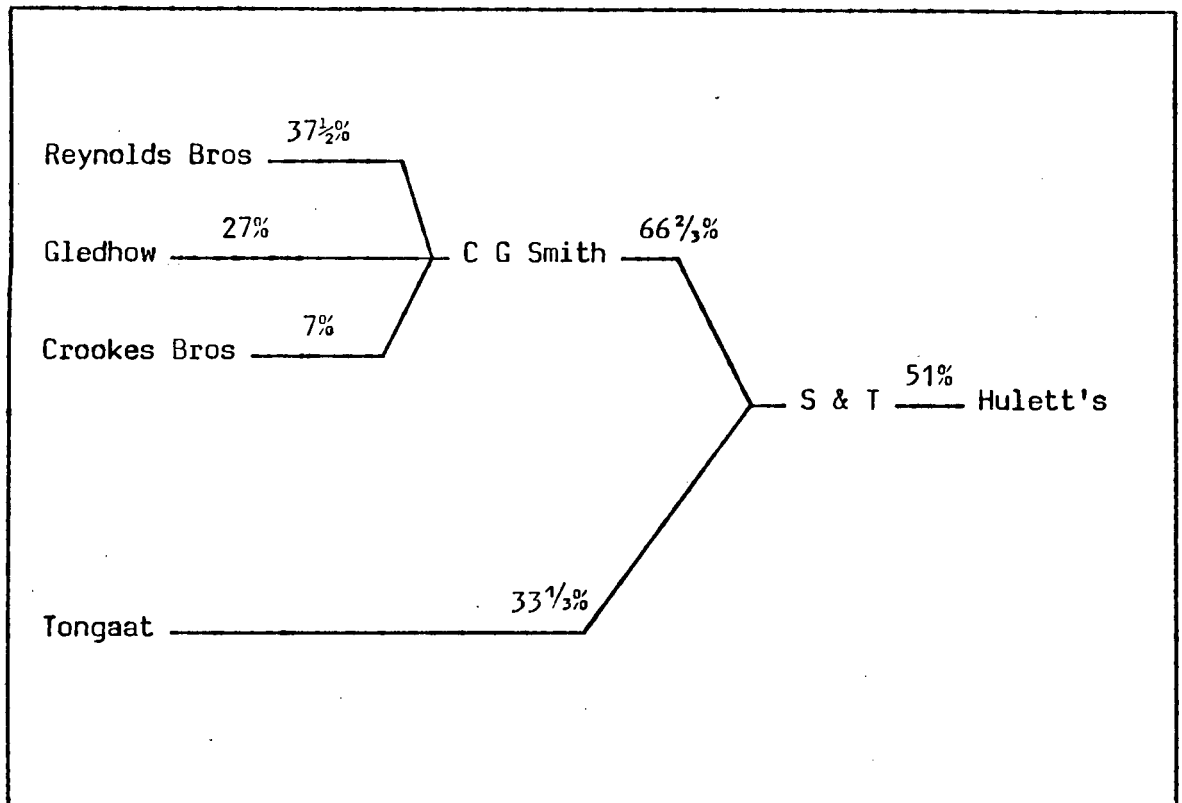
controlling interest in Natal Estates. An hour after Hulett's announcement, G.V.Crookes, D.Saunders, and a financial adviser visited him to inform him that the Smith-Tongaat consortium was to make an offer for Sir J.L.Hulett & Sons shares. By early in November the consortium had reached its objective by acquiring 51% of Hulett's equity. Following share exchanges within the Smith Group, the consortium was constituted early in 1963 as S & T Investments (Pty) Ltd., with two-thirds control vested in the Smith Group and one third in Tongaat. Guy Hulett's resignation from Hulett's board as a consequence of this sequence of events symbolised an important stage in the history of the sugarocracy's ascendancy.

A lesser known aspect of the 1962 take-over was the role played therein by finance capital. As the **Financial Mail** saw it, the counter-bid for Hulett's "had the hall-mark of a daring manoeuvre conceived in the fertile brain of Johannesburg financiers, not of Natal sugar growers".⁵³ Although the evidence would suggest that this was an underestimation of the sugarocracy's prowess, it is clear that the take-over was contingent upon the backing of "Johannesburg financiers". The S & T consortium received the support of Anglo-American's merchant bank, United Acceptances Ltd., while Old Mutual and Sanlam are said to have stood behind Hulett's (notwithstanding the links between United Acceptances and Old Mutual).

This was not the first time that non-sugar capital had made inroads into the local sugar industry, but the tempo of that involvement was to take on new proportions after 1962. At the end of the 1962 take-over the major sugar companies were internally structured as shown in Figure 2.

⁵³ **Financial Mail** 16.11.1962, p.818.

FIGURE 2: AFTERMATH OF SUGAR COMPANY TAKE-OVERS IN 1962



Source: *Financial Mail* (Special Supplement) 19.2.65, p 78.

Corporate Intrusions into the Sugar Industry after 1962

Internal restructuring was also being effected elsewhere, and Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal Sugar Co., which had closed its Chaka's Kraal sugarmill in 1961, was reconstituted as the Gledhow Sugar Co. in 1964. During 1964 Illovo acquired Doornkop. The major shareholder in Doornkop had until then been General Mining and Finance, which now offered to advise Illovo on the financial aspects of their new acquisition.⁵⁴ Illovo's Noodsberg Sugar Company was also formed in 1964 to operate the new sugarmill that it was to build at Jaagbaan, in the Natal midlands. In 1966 another new sugarmill was opened in the midlands at Dalton, under the ownership and control of the Union Co-operative Bark and Sugar Co., and the Malelane sugarmill in the Transvaal lowveld came into

⁵⁴ *Financial Mail* 26.3.1964, p.683.

production. The Malelane sugarmill was owned by Transvaalse Suikerkorporasie, in which initially Volkskas had a 60% stake and General Mining and Finance the balance; later Volkskas took over the entire company. The Jaagbaan, Dalton, and Malelane sugarmills, as well as the reconstructed Pongola sugarmill were established in new sugarcane growing regions. Thus while centralisation of ownership was in progress, by 1970 the number of sugarmills in South Africa had increased to twenty, three more than there had been in 1950.⁵⁵

In 1970 Tate & Lyle, the British-based multi-national sugar corporation acquired a 49,25% share of Illovo Sugar Estates. Then in 1975, through a merger with Reynolds Bros. (which owned Umzinkulu Sugar Co. by then, and which had bought Gledhow Sugar Co. and the Crookes Bros.' sugarmill), C.G.Smith came to control seven sugarmills. One of these sugarmills, at Doornkop, was simultaneously sold to Hulett's, which closed it down, being interested only in the milling rights involved. C.G.Smith's Renishaw sugarmill was closed in 1976, and in 1977 the company bought the controlling share in Illovo formerly held by Tate & Lyle. In 1978 the Melville sugarmill (previously owned by the Mauritian company of Stafford Mayer, which had relinquished control to S.A.Board Mills, which was bought in turn by Anglo-American in 1974) was bought jointly by Tongaat and C.G.Smith and closed, with cane diverted to two of their sugarmills. This left seventeen sugarmills in operation in the late 1970s. Six of these were controlled by C.G.Smith, five by Hulett's, one by Tongaat, and C.G.Smith and Tongaat were jointly in control of Hulett's.

⁵⁵ This process of centralisation has been outlined elsewhere. See D.Lincoln, "South African Sugar Mill Labour during the 1970s", *South African Labour Bulletin* 6:6(1981), pp.37-48.

Late in 1979 a new corporate intrusion was made into the sugar industry, when Barlow Rand found it opportune to wrest some control thereof. Following complex negotiations and share trading, Barlow Rand acquired a controlling interest in C.G.Smith in 1980, and the dealings left Anglo-American in ultimate control of Hulett's and Tongaat. An Anglo-American front company subsequently bought a large block of sugar farms which constituted a 40% proportion of the Umfolozi co-operative sugarmill's cane source. The situation prevailing at the end of 1980 is shown in Figure 3. The latest developments of note occurred in 1982 when Hulett's and Tongaat were brought together as one company, under the title of Tongaat-Hulett's, and C.G.Smith bought into Monitor Sugar Company in Michigan, U.S.A..⁵⁶ The dramatic struggle within the sugarocracy had some time since reached its pinnacle, and the sugar industry was now almost completely enveloped by mining, industrial, and financial corporations.

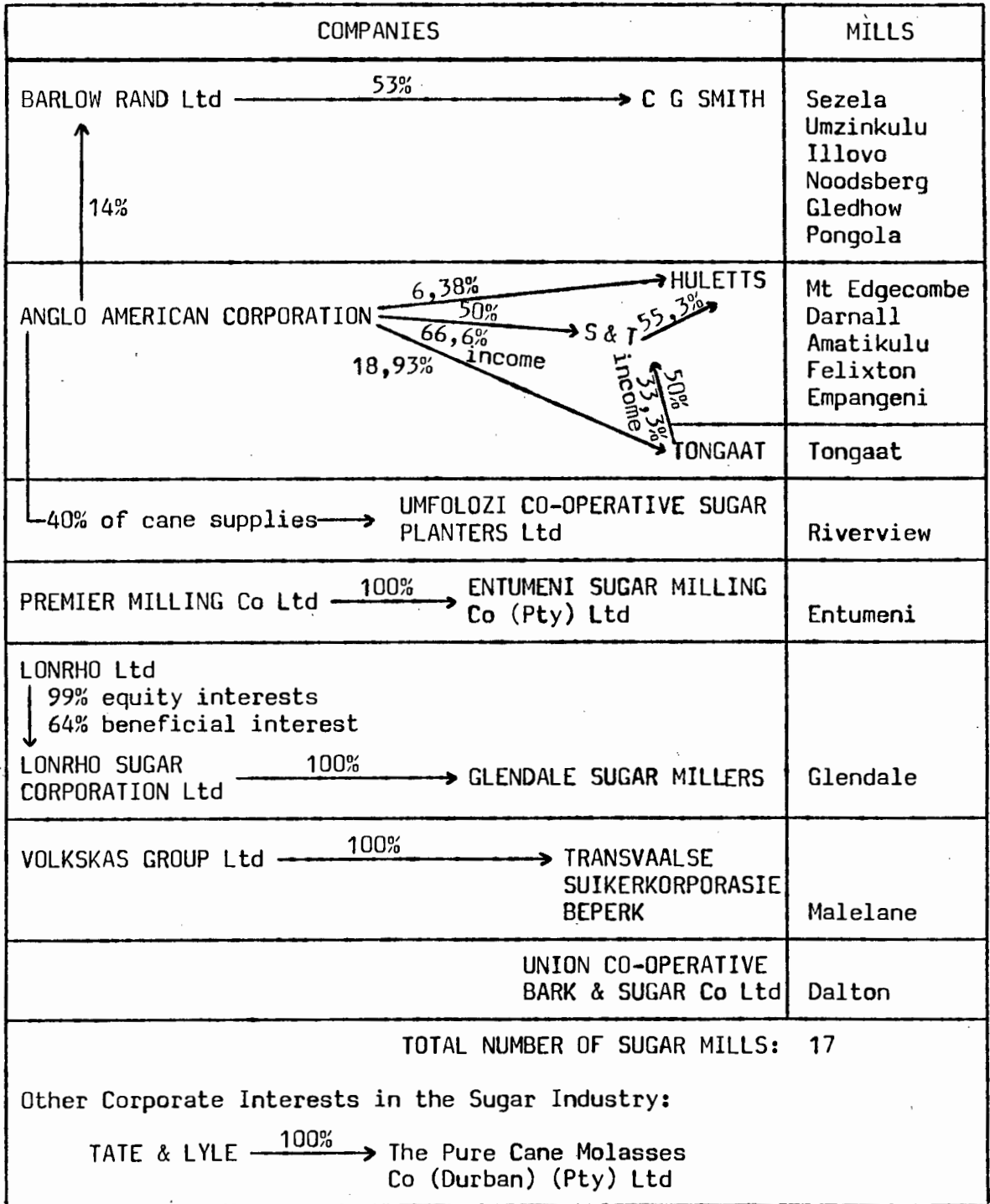
Summary

The broad contours of the political economy of sugar production during Natal's sugarocratic era have been followed through three periods. It was the opening up of Zululand to sugar-producers in 1905 which signalled the beginning of the first of these periods. Between 1905 and 1914 the sugarocracy consolidated itself as a group of industrialists, most notably with respect to refining arrangements.

Between 1914 and the late 1930s the sugarocracy endured what was arguably its most crucial period. During the war years the sugarocracy turned its hand to institutional means of pursuing protectionist ambitions, and once the war-time constraints on domestic prices and

⁵⁶ Smithlink (April, 1982).

FIGURE 3: OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SUGAR MILLS IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1980



Source: South African Sugar Journal 64:8 (1980), p 332; South African Sugar Year Book (1979); and the following company reports: Anglo American Corp (1980), Barlow Rand Ltd (1980), Lonrho Sugar Corp (1979), Premier Milling Co (1980), Tate & Lyle Ltd (1979), Volkskas Group Ltd (1980).

exports had been lifted it succeeded in drawing growers into a new organisation, SASA, in order to tackle domestic marketing policies as a united front. This unity was built on the shaky foundation of long-standing growers' antipathy and suspicion. This antagonism was not resolved by the 1926 Fahey Conference Agreement which generally favoured the sugarmillers. During the decade between the signing of the Fahey Agreement and the promulgation of the 1936 Sugar Act the sugarmillers faced a continuing barrage of criticism from growers and, in the early 1930s, a major depression of the international sugar economy. The terms of the 1936 Act did much to resolve miller/grower quarrels, as well as establishing a quota system to control the marketing of sugar. Further control was introduced in the context of the 1937 ISA, and thus by the outbreak of World War II the sugarocracy was subjected to a body of local and international regulations.

The final period during the sugarocratic era spanned World War II and the post-war years until 1962. Three major issues characterised this period: a significantly large growth in sugar production; a greater dependence of the sugarocracy on international sugar agreements; and an intensified centralisation of sugarmill ownership. Sugar production began expanding in response to the war-time demand from both the rapidly growing domestic market and Britain. Although they had to supply the home market at relatively low prices fixed by the state, South Africa's sugarmillers had a secure position in the world sugar economy by virtue of their standing as Commonwealth producers. South Africa's departure from the British Commonwealth in 1961 necessitated a revision of exporting arrangements. No sooner had this necessity been attended to than the world sugar price slumped to its lowest ebb since the last War. Hard-hit, South Africa's sugarmillers began to diversify their investments as a precaution for the future. Then, with the

massive revival of the export market in progress, the sugarocracy fought its internecine struggle for supremacy at the end of 1962.

Sugarocrats had not of course engaged in struggles with growers, with foreign producers, and between themselves as purely economic agents. Their struggles involved them in a range of political practices, some of which went beyond the ambit of their direct relationships with the government and with growers. This wider terrain, constituted as the sugarocracy's culture, is surveyed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CULTURE OF THE SUGAROCRACY

With few exceptions, the first sugarocrats had their roots in **fin de siecle** Victorian Britain. Anticipating colonial prosperity, they travelled to Natal alone or with their families. They came from petit-bourgeois backgrounds and, fired with entrepreneurial spirit, they gradually consolidated their grip over Natal's burgeoning sugar industry. It was especially in its reproduction that the sugarocracy took on the mantle of a fully-fledged stratum of the South African bourgeoisie. Not only was an economic legacy passed on to later generations of the sugarocracy, but also particular political interests and an exclusive way of life that implied quite specific ideological concerns. A distinctive culture was thus set in motion, with traditions to be upheld by successive generations in the sugarocratic genealogy.

There are many difficulties encountered when attempting to adduce the ideological basis of any given group's actions, no less so with regard to the sugarocracy. Therefore if a "sugarmillers' consciousness" is to be referred to and if the ideological underpinnings of the employment practices which are discussed later are to be exposed, then the full spectrum of sugarocratic culture must be subjected to scrutiny. The task is undertaken in this chapter under four headings. In the first section the Natal sugarocracy is situated in its wider context; the domestic and community life of the sugarocracy is then dealt with; thirdly the sugarocracy's ideology, its intellectual pursuits, and its mobilisation of a sugarocratic image are discussed; and finally the sugarocracy's work in the institutionalised political sphere is considered. Emphasis is placed on the pre-World War II period, before sugar company bureaucratization and the atomisation of the sugarocracy

began gathering momentum.

Conceptualising the Culture of a Sugarocracy

The existence of dynastic sugarmilling families within societies dominated by a capitalist mode of production has not given rise to the sort of planter culture about which generalisation is both possible and feasible. A European colony's slave-owning planters can readily be referred to as having constituted a regional plantocracy with a distinctive culture. The plantation colony's incipient bourgeoisie was generally formed of merchants and planters, and the distinctive culture of the latter related to ownership of slaves, land, and the technical means of colonial production. By contrast, there is hardly a case to be made for regarding "sugarocratic culture" as anything but a transient and regionally isolated phenomenon. Even where sugarmilling families resisted the erosion of their dynastic control for prolonged periods under capitalism, they have constituted a small and diminishing component of bourgeois society.

All this is to say that whereas planter culture may have once been an identifiable and general mode of quotidian existence and class rule, "sugarocratic culture" is a term of dubious analytical worth. There is therefore more than semantics at issue when analysis proceeds with reference to the culture of a sugarocracy instead of to sugarocratic culture.

An image has been created, in the relevant literature, of colonial plantocracies imbued with hedonism, and given to ostentation and excess; of a planter culture which encompassed violence and oppression as well

as Christianity, racism as well as sexual exploitation of slaves. This contradiction-fraught culture was ascribed to planters of various crops, including sugar, and it was synonymous with colonial ruling class culture.¹ Moreover, national or colonial interests were equivalent to or strongly representative of planters' interests. In the age of the sugarocrats, it was only where they continued to exist in (agrarian) mono-cultural, usually island, economies that their culture was at once the culture of the ruling class. Elsewhere sugarocrats were a constituent element of a burgeoning bourgeoisie with complex ideological and institutional concerns. Nevertheless, bourgeois sugarmillers had specific economic and thus political interests. In colonial situations such as Natal, Queensland, or Moçambique, they had a peculiar social identity and way of life which was resonant of metropolitan bourgeois culture, but which was not immediately subsumed under colonial bourgeois culture.

When sugarocracies appeared in previously planter-dominated societies, there was a great deal of common ground between their respective ways of life: the mansions in which they lived had more servants than occupants; their daily activities often precluded any direct involvement with the work of their employees; they upheld the old religious and social institutions; and they surrounded themselves with the ideas and artefacts of ruling class existence. There were also great differences between the culture of colonial planters and that of sugarocrats; these differences being historically far more significant than the similarities. Apart from the implications of owner/worker relations having supplanted planter/slave relations, sugarocrats were on the one hand locked into an interdependent relationship with growers, and on the

¹ See for example the controversial W.J.Cash, *The Mind of the South*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1941.

other hand they had to relate to other elements of the bourgeoisie. These relationships demanded then the erection of an ideological and institutional superstructure which was quite removed from that of the former plantation colonies. And the more developed the bourgeois state, the more specific were the ideological and institutional channels which sugarocrats had of necessity to follow.

Those aspects of their culture which were exclusive to the Natal sugarocracy were defined by their original social status as settlers in a young British colony and by their economic status as millers-cum-planters. Their culture reflected the consequences of both the confrontation between these structural factors and the ideology of settler sugarocrats, and the way in which the sugarmillers' consciousness developed beyond that initial stage.

The Domestic and Community Life of the South African Sugarocracy

British settler culture has had two characteristics which, inasmuch as they cut across the bounds of class, gave added emphasis to the fundamental schism between coloniser and colonised. But these two characteristics - the use of black domestic workers and social cohesion amongst settlers - have varied quantitatively and qualitatively amongst classes within settler society. Although perhaps not given to the excesses of their counterparts of yore across the Atlantic Ocean, the Natal sugarocrats exhibited a far from ascetic appreciation of their wealth and power. Their quotidian culture was furthermore indicative of a high degree of familiarity and identification which sugarocrats had with traditions peculiar to the group. Such a shared body of values pertaining to work, education, patriotism, religion, and leisure consolidated their economic cohesion and underlined the material

distance from their employees which their wealth afforded them. It is instructive to begin an exploration of this culture on the sugarocratic hearth.

Amongst the more conspicuous trappings of sugarocratic existence were the mansions built and furnished on the lines of the aristocratic British "family seat". On the north end of Durban's Berea ridge was erected J.L.Hulett's Manor House in 1904; on the south end of the Berea was the slightly less imposing Manor House which belonged to C.G.Smith since 1912; and between the two Muckleneuk, first occupied by the Campbells in 1914. The Campbells' former residence, Mount Edgecombe House, and the Saunders' country seat Amanzimnyama, both of them to the north of Durban, counterposed the Reynolds' Lynton Hall and the Crookes' The Cedars on the Natal south coast. Then there were the other rural homes such as the Pearces' Eden, the Hawksworths' Beneva, and Hulett's original Kearsney House which

was a well made and designed mansion with large, artistically furnished reception rooms and 22 bedrooms...

There was a big staff of Indian servants supervised by Michael, the butler, who had acted in a similar capacity to Lord Roberts in India.²

And we have been invited also to

Picture the homes of these four sons [of J.L.Hulett], each built on lavish and artistic lines in a perfect rural setting. Over the years their surroundings had matured and mellowed with continuous cultivation. The families had increased and in each household a gracious standard of living was the keynote. This was the standard set by Sir Liege.³

Architectural styles and furnishings were transposed from bourgeois Britain, and even in naming their homes the sugarocrats were determined to bring to Africa the accoutrements of a class to which they had not

² R.F.Osborn, *This Man of Purpose: A Biography of Sir James Liege Hulett*. Edited by J.Hulett. Umhlali: W.H.Hulett, 1973, p.37.

³ *Ibid.*, p.42.

strictly belonged in their country of origin.

In keeping with the image which they were intended to convey, some of the houses became depositories of artworks collected locally and abroad. Certain of the houses were placed at the disposal of South African prime ministers or English royalty. The most notable of these was one which F.Reynolds built at Umdoni Park for the express purpose of donating it to Louis Botha for use as a holiday residence by himself and his successors in office. Receptions for visiting dignitaries cemented links with those in political power and with prominent artists and writers. These receptions were impressive even by the standards of Natal's bourgeoisie, on a scale extending to the heights reached when

Louis Botha, the newly appointed Prime Minister, was entertained [by Hulett] at Manor House. On this occasion the Durban Light Infantry supplied the music for more than a thousand guests. Frock coats and top hats, long frocks, high waists, British Officers in red mess-jackets; all interspersed with white turbaned Indian servants scurrying to and fro; the tinkle of ice in long glasses combined to gladden a scene not forgotten in Durban for many a day.⁴

How the occupants of the grand sugarocratic houses spent their time when at home and not entertaining was consistent with their bourgeois standing. For example, Amanzimnyama's first sugarocratic matriarch, the wife of J.R.Saunders

held family prayers in the vernaculars for her domestics and workers, painted in water-colours and corresponded with the botanical authorities at Kew concerning the specimens (chiefly orchids) brought to her from the forest.⁵

A later matriarch of Amanzimnyama has been remembered in the 1920s to have often been seen "driving past in her shiny victoria carriage with

⁴ Ibid., p.93.

⁵ R.G.T.Watson, "The Tongaati", *Condenser* 2:3(1954), pp.12-20.

Moonsammy in his white livery and red pugaree on the box";⁶ she was, according to another recollection, conspicuous for

the two matched greys, the gleaming harness and...her party dress, her long gloves and her parasol...Sometimes she would call on Moonsammy to stop the carriage while she exchanged a word or two with a bystander, be he manager, fitter or humble Indian mill hand.⁷

Subsequent generations of sugarocratic women immersed themselves when at home in gardening, hand-work, writing and culinary crafts, often with an eye to charitable causes and the annual exhibitions of the women's organisations to which they belonged as founders or members. An entourage of black domestic servants lent assistance and helped to project a genteel facade on the home front; whether uniformly attired and discreet in the house or working outdoors as gardeners and drivers, it was these, usually adult, "boys and girls" whose toil gave cause for employers' pride in their homes and gardens. The more profound the loyalty or deference of servants, and the longer their periods of service, the closer they came to being paternalistically considered as "part of the family".

From their home bases, sugarocratic families ventured on sporting or vacational outings. Roy Campbell, the renowned poet and author, has committed to perpetuity his memory of holidays spent by his family at their Peace Cottage near Umhlanga Rocks (another home in which Botha was received for holidays).⁸ In later years William Campbell paid periodic visits, once with a British royal party, to his private game reserve Mala Mala in the eastern Transvaal.⁹ C.G.Smith went as far afield as Britain, Egypt, Madagascar, and Moçambique to pursue his interests in

⁶ *Condenser* 5:5(1967), p.7.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ R.Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*. London: Hollis & Carter, 1951.

⁹ *SASJ* 14:8(1930), p.525.

hunting and fishing.¹⁰ Sea excursions to Cape Town, East Africa or Europe were undertaken by the older generation of sugarocrats, and George Armstrong gained a reputation for his trips to East Africa and Europe in the early days of passenger flight. The daughter of Frank Reynolds was in the late 1920s an aviatrix with her own aeroplane,¹¹ and another amateur pilot, W.H.Hulett, won the Governor General's air race in 1937.¹² The horse racing community in Natal has also counted in its numbers people such as C.G.Smith and C.J.Saunders.

Their competence at replicating the houses and life-styles of the British bourgeoisie was matched by the sugarocracy's ability to promote religious and educational institutions in Natal. The first-generation sugarocrats were stalwart protestants - Anglicans and Methodists. And if their houses were a reflection of the sugarocracy's achievement of, and keenness to display, the status they had as an adjunct to the British bourgeoisie, their accomplishments in the sphere of schooling were no less impressive. Sugarocratic ideology and behaviour were vividly seen to be causally related where their involvement with church and school was concerned.

William Campbell, "a rigid Calvinist", had in his youth contemplated the prospect of doing missionary work in Africa.¹³ When eventually he did come to Africa it was not as a missionary, although his proselytizing fervour was not obviously dampened. In Durban he had been party to the establishment of a Mechanics' Institute during 1853;¹⁴ bringing to the colony a young men's centre for part-time study - "colonists of better

¹⁰ R.F.Osborn, **C.G.: A Great Natalian: A Biography of Sir Charles George Smith**. Durban: C.G.Smith, 1966, p.87.

¹¹ **SASJ** 13:9(1929), p.619.

¹² **SASJ** 20:7(1937), p.393.

¹³ N.Herd, **Killie's Africa: The Achievements of Dr. Killie Campbell**. Pietermaritzburg: Blue Crane Books, 1982, p.3.

¹⁴ **Ibid.**, p.10.

financial standing were doubtful of the propriety of patronizing the institute"¹⁵ - much like those he had in his own youth attended in Glasgow. Campbell also assisted in the establishment of the Verulam Library and Literary Institute in 1858.¹⁶ This institute was one of a number of organisations founded in early Verulam, at the heart of the north coast community of Wesleyan settlers which included Polkinghorne, Starrs, and, of course, Huletts.¹⁷ Another local organisation was the Sunday School Association, which embodied the collaborative efforts of Verulam's Anglicans and Methodists.¹⁸ On the south coast, one of Natal's earliest Anglican parishes was formed in the community comprising residents of Umzinto Sugar Company and related estates.¹⁹ Here on the south coast, the Reynolds' were Anglicans and amongst the Crookes' were some very devout Methodists.

When the "hereticism" of Bishop Colenso became an issue of public concern, colonial sugarocrats became embroiled in the mêlée which culminated in the bifurcation of the Anglican Church into the Church of England in South Africa and the Church of the Province of South Africa.²⁰ Although Marshall Campbell's views on the future of Africans in South Africa were said to be similar to those held by Colenso, Campbell was offended by Colenso's radical approach to his religion.²¹ The Saunders' - "reactionary products of mid-century Anglicanism"²² -

¹⁵ A.F.Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940, p.102.

¹⁶ See M.Park, "The History of Early Verulam, 1850-1860", *Archives Year Book for South African History* 2(1953), pp.241-306.

¹⁷ See R.E.Ralls, "Early Immigration Schemes in Natal, 1846-1853", Master's dissertation, University of Natal, 1934.

¹⁸ See Park, "Early Verulam".

¹⁹ B.B.Burnett, *Anglicans in Natal*. Durban: Churchwardens, St.Paul's, 1955(?), p.87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

²¹ Herd, *Killie's Africa*. p.14.

²² R.G.T.Watson, *Tongaati: An African Experiment*. London: Hutchinson, 1960, p.74.

were equally intolerant of Colenso's style, and J.R.Saunders had once gone so far as to suggest that Colenso was responsible for inciting Africans to take up arms against the settlers in 1879.²³

J.L.Hulett had an abiding interest in and influence upon church affairs and education in Natal. His father had established a small school in the colony, and he himself had been an active member of the Verulam Sunday School Association in the 1850s and 60s. He later offered Kearsney House to the Methodist church so that Kearsney College could be founded there in 1921. In the early 1930s the school was moved to Botha's Hill, where part of the grounds had been made available by G.J.Crookes. J.J.Crookes donated one of the houses, which was named after the Crookes' home town in Yorkshire, and another house was named after the Hulett home in Kent.²⁴

The metropolitan and sugarocratic connections were just as pronounced at Hilton College, an Anglican school which since 1903 had been owned by Hilton College Ltd., of which Marshall Campbell was one of the largest shareholders. Strongly influenced by England's Rugby School and proclaimed "the cradle of school rugby in Natal",²⁵ Hilton College was heavily supported by the Campbells, Crookes', Saunders', Reynolds', G.S.Armstrong, C.G.Smith, C.G.Smith & Co., and Natal Estates. Hence the William Campbell and the Crookes blocks of the school, and its Edward Saunders Sanatorium.²⁶ W.E.R.Edwards, Hulett's managing director and guest on Hilton's 1938 speech day, might just as well have been

²³ **Natal Mercury** 3.4.1879. J.R.Saunders also contributed an article on church affairs in Natal to the **English Churchman** in 1890.

²⁴ Osborn, **Man of Purpose**; J.F.Reese, **The Birth and Development of Kearsney College**. Eshowe: Zululand Times, 1975; and **SASJ** 20:11(1937), p.651.

²⁵ A.F.Hattersley, **Hilton Portrait**. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1945, p.51.

²⁶ N.Nuttall, **Lift up Your Hearts**. Durban: Hiltonian Society, 1971.

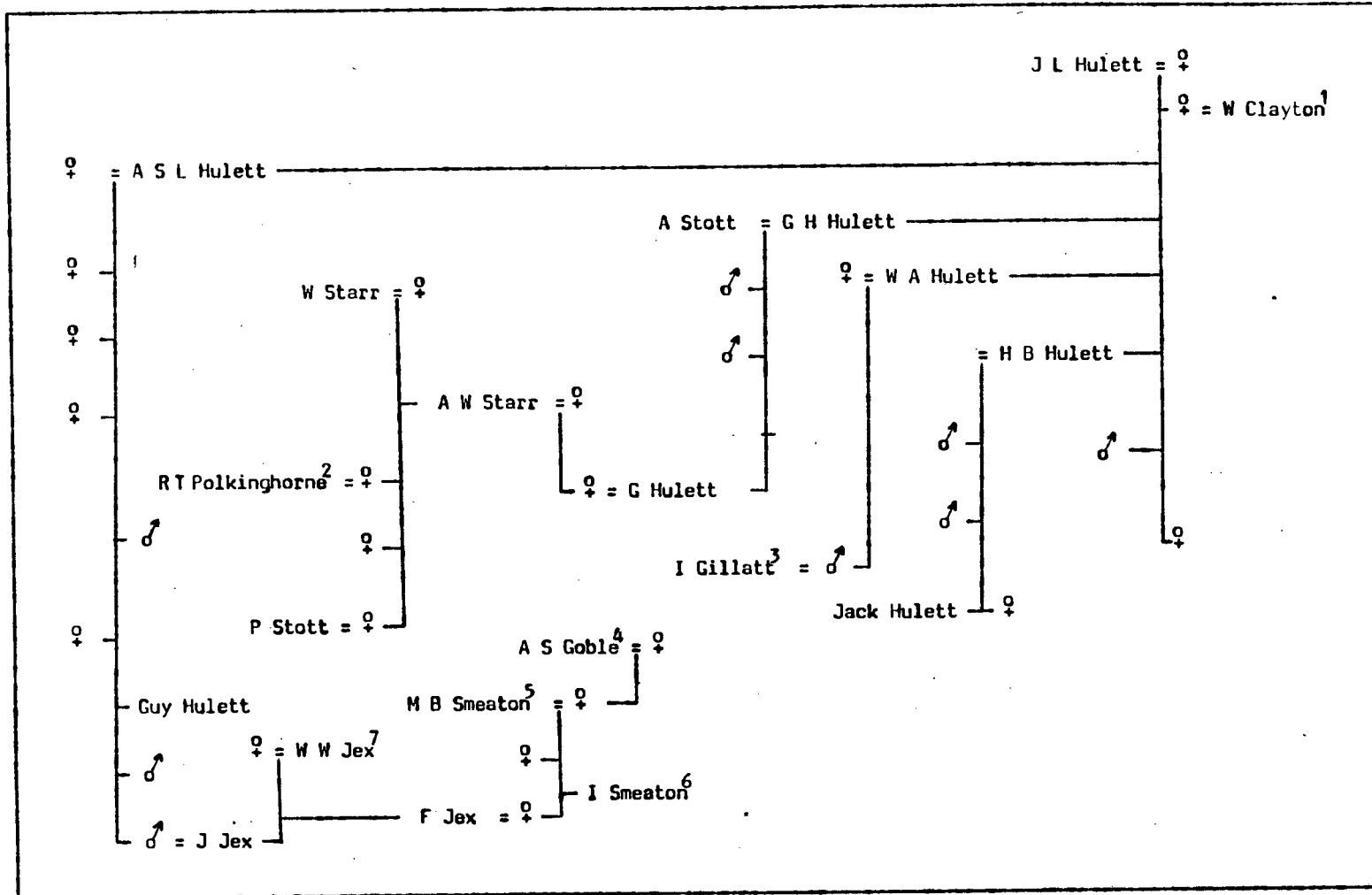
referring to Kearsney College when he expressed his confidence that "whilst you are at Hilton, with its traditions of manliness and sporting spirit, the foundation for the future is being laid".²⁷

The future of every young sugarocrat may not have been determined by his schooling, but that experience certainly buttressed his class position. The schools established by sugarocrats or chosen for their sons' education were colleges for the progeny of Natal's élite: private, expensive, protestant, boys' boarding schools, originally intended to imbue their pupils with the social and ideological attributes of the British bourgeoisie, and the tenets of that class's morality.

The domestic, religious, and educational institutions given birth to by the sugarocrats were complemented by their conjugal relations to endow them still further with bourgeois status. While dynastic lineages were established through inheritance, marriage partners furnished ties amongst the respective sugarocratic families and between sugarocrats and other members of the bourgeoisie; there was little ambiguity about their class position reflected in their choice of marriage partners. To go beyond such a generalisation from a basis of names appearing on family "trees" is undoubtedly hazardous, yet when looked at in conjunction with information about sugar companies' directorates these family trees do invite some commentary. Three such trees have been constructed and depicted in Figures 4, 5, and 6. The only marriages shown are those of immediate relevance to the study, and which have received publicity through generally available media. In this they afford merely a partial exposure to the links of consanguinity within the sugarocracy. Another

²⁷ SASJ 21:11(1938), p.625. While providing a useful context within which to situate the efforts of sugarocrats to foster élite schools in Natal, Randall had little to contribute on Kearsney College in particular (P.Randall, **Little England on the Veld: The English Private School System in South Africa**. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1982).

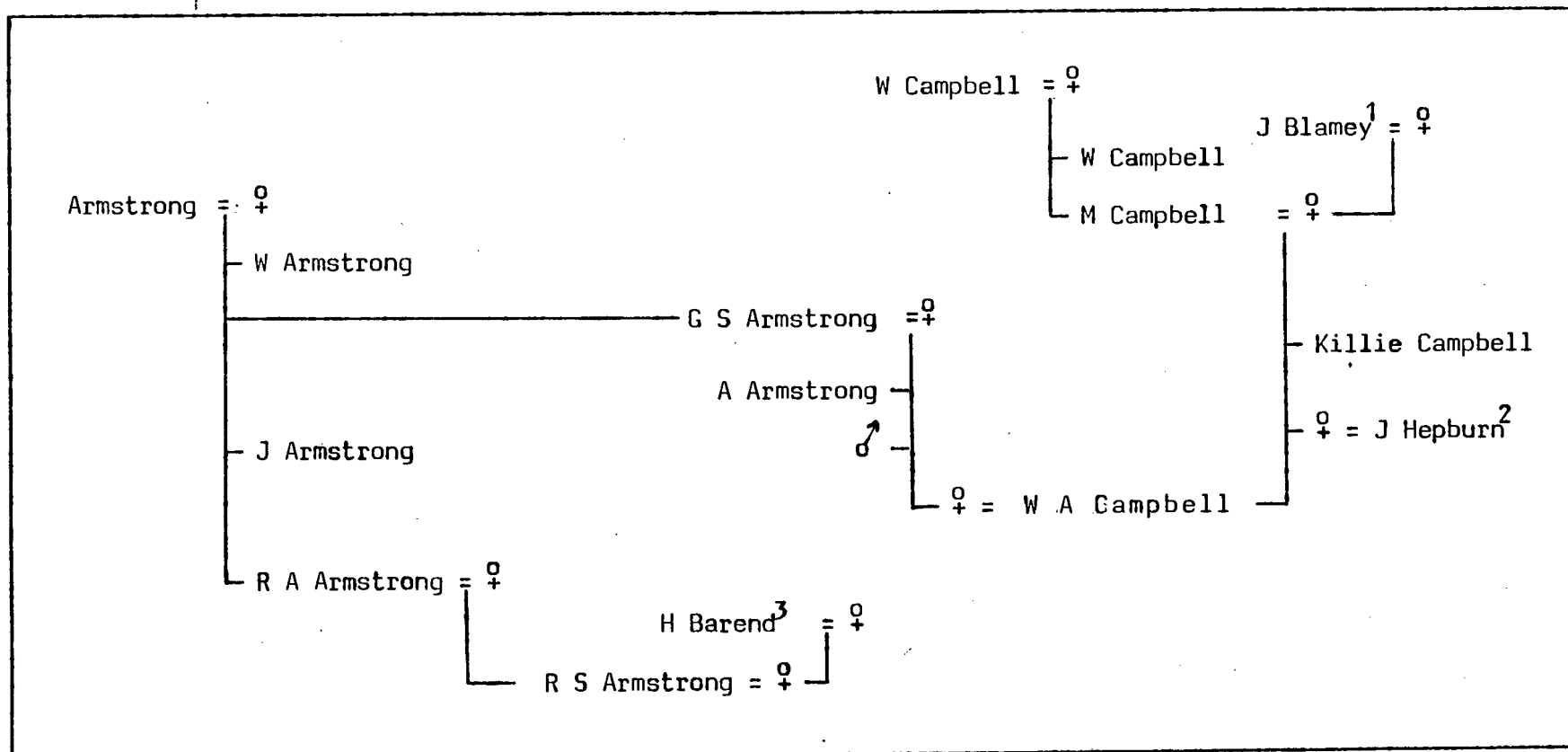
FIGURE 4: SUGAROCRATIC FAMILY TIES - HULETT



- Notes:
- 1 Colonial Minister of Agriculture
 - 2 Director of Tongaat Sugar Co
 - 3 See Gillatts listed in Appendix 1, and mentioned in Figure 6
 - 4 Head of A A Smith, sugar agents, and director of ZSM
 - 5 Reynolds Bros employee
 - 6 SACGA President
 - 7 Secretary and subsequently director of ZSM & P

Sources: R F Osborn, *This Man of Purpose: A Biography of Sir James Liege Hulett*. Edited by J Hulett. Umhlali: W H Hulett, 1973; and South African Sugar Journal, passim.

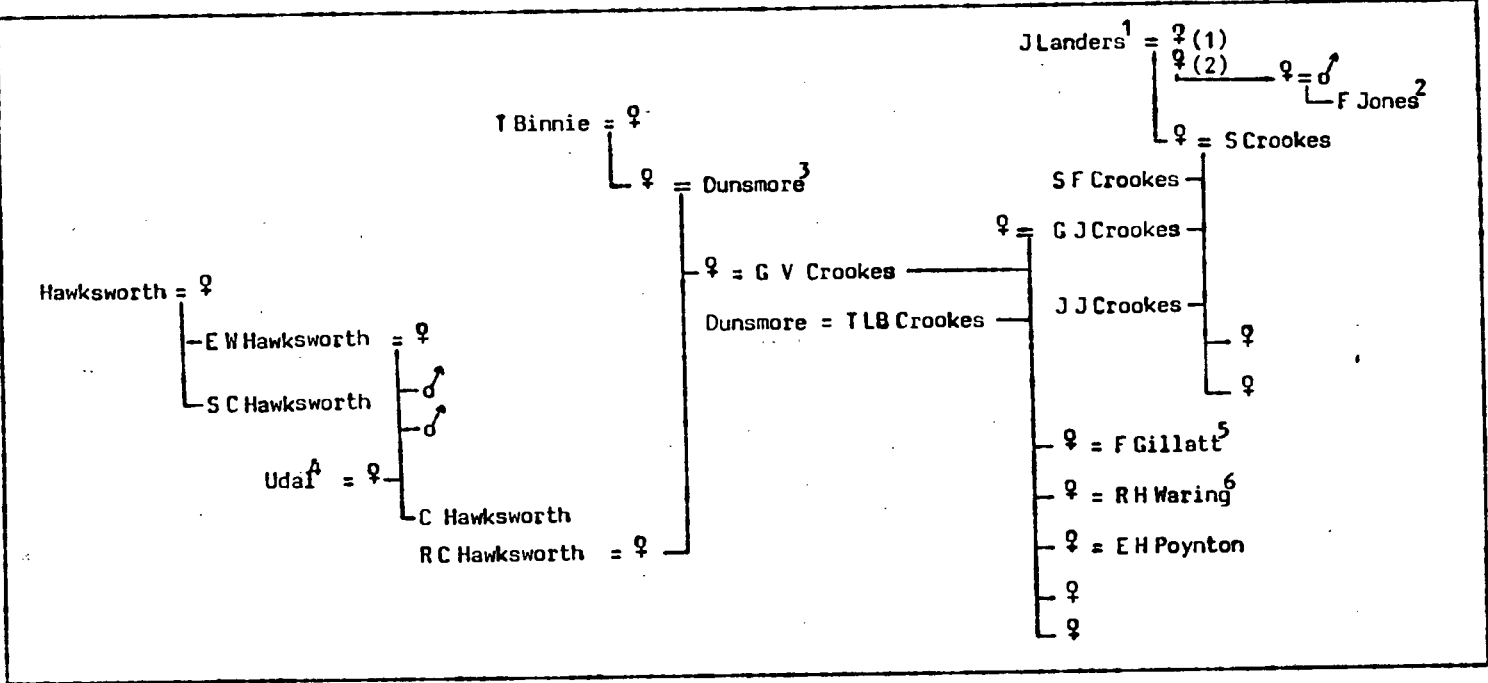
FIGURE 5: SUGAROCRATIC FAMILY TIES - CAMPBELLS/ARMSTRONGS



- Notes:
- 1 First owner of Mount Prospect (later La Mercy) sugarmill
 - 2 See Hepburns listed in Appendix 1
 - 3 Secretary for ZSM & P

Sources: *South African Sugar Journal* *passim*.

FIGURE 6: SUGAROCRATIC FAMILY TIES - CROOKES'



- Notes:
- 1 First owner of Renishaw sugarmill
 - 2 Director of C G Smith (see Appendix 1)
 - 3 South African representative of A & W Smith, Glasgow sugar machinery manufacturers
 - 4 Probably a C G Smith employee
 - 5 See Gillatts listed in Appendix 1
 - 6 General manager and director of Pongola

Sources: *South African Sugar Journal* passim; *Who's Who of Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Combined Publishers, 1970.

qualification that needs to be made about the figures is that they show relationships over several generations without specifying the actual times when the linkages were made.

In Figure 4 it is seen that the Huletts and the Crookes' were within three generations widely spread, by virtue of their relatively large families. In the case of the Huletts, many marriages are seen to have taken place within the north coast planting community, including the old Wesleyan settler families of Polkinghorne and Starr. Similarly, the Crookes' had strong bonds with planters, and in their case with company-related individuals too. Although ties between the Crookes' and Hawksworths are not fully confirmed by the diagrams, they are suggested. The familial bonds between the Armstrongs and the Campbells are more obvious.

The totality of family connections indicated in the figures provides an idea of how closely-knit the community of settler sugarmillers was, and how as the group of sugarmillers became more concentrated, planters descendant from the earliest sugarmillers, as well as certain senior company personnel, were still closely associated. Thus, when W.H.Hulett and J.M.Jex were married, A.Townsend was one who formally made a toast;²⁸ when Lewis, the son of F.Reynolds, was married, it was W.E.R.Edwards who "gave away the bride";²⁹ and C.J.Saunders of Tongaat married the daughter of a Natal Estates director, H.R.Butcher.³⁰ Not too much more can be read into these observations as to how marriage might have had a bearing on economic relations within the sugarocracy. Similarly, little can be safely said about such relationships within the

²⁸ SASJ 15:5(1931), p.311.

²⁹ SASJ 14:4(1930), p.231.

³⁰ *Who's Who of Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Combined Publishers, 1970.

sugarocracy as that which had C.G.Smith become O.Pearce's godfather.³¹ Deduction must remain in abeyance on these issues, but that is not to say that the significance of marriage is being discounted.

The seeds of sugarocratic culture were thus sown through religious and educational institutions and through marriage. The culture was nurtured in bourgeois homes and in bourgeois leisure-time activities. It was more than a domestic way of life that was in formation, but also a wider sugarocratic culture enveloped by bourgeois ideology. In the political sphere of that culture, as is shown later in this chapter, the parties supported by their fathers found ready recruits amongst second- and third-generation sugarocrats. And when parliamentary politics were overshadowed by war-time *Realpolitik*, soldiering traditions were created within the sugarocracy. Many of Natal's colonial sugarmillers fought under arms in the Anglo-Zulu wars, and some during the rebellion of 1906. For example, W.Pearce fought in the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War and in 1906 was commander of Durban County;³² Friend Addison became colonel and officer commanding of Umvoti Mounted Rifles, in which regiment he had done battle in 1879;³³ W.G.Armstrong fought in the Anglo-Zulu War with the Victoria Mounted Rifles;³⁴ R.A.Armstrong was a captain in the Natal Mounted Rifles during the 1906 uprising,³⁵ as was W.A.Campbell;³⁶ and F.Reynolds served as an officer with the Alexander Mounted Rifles.³⁷ There were other members of the sugarocracy who might be mentioned in this context. The two world wars exacted a heavy toll, given the size of the sugarocracy. A son of E.Saunders',³⁸ members of the Armstrong

³¹ *Smithlink* 1:8(1978), pp.14-16.

³² *South African Sugar Year Book* (1939-40), pp.215-216.

³³ *SASJ* 9:8(1925), p.549.

³⁴ *SASJ* 9:2(1925), p.109.

³⁵ *South African Sugar Year Book* (1941-42), p.214.

³⁶ *SASJ* 42:7(1958), p.567.

³⁷ *SASJ* 14:10(1930), p.681.

³⁸ *SASJ* 2:4(1918), p.1167.

family,³⁹ and H.E.Hawksworth lost their lives.⁴⁰ Apart from war-time action, usually with officer rank, some sugarocrats supported Natal regiments by other means, and well into the post-colonial period. C.G.Smith had paid bounties to Royal Durban Light Infantry recruits during World War I,⁴¹ and W.A.Campbell, who had once been a Royal Durban Light Infantry recruiter, was an honorary colonel of the Natal Mounted Rifles.⁴²

On another front sugarocrats were often remembered for their philanthropy.⁴³ In 1939 G.J.Crookes donated a hospital to the province of Natal;⁴⁴ E.Saunders' "generosity was stealthy - few knew of his benefactions",⁴⁵ and R.Armstrong's "generosity was always cloaked by anonymity".⁴⁶ Their gestures of philanthropy were frequently tangible shows of patriotism. C.G.Smith supplied the Imperial Government with horses worth half a million pounds for military purposes,⁴⁷ and he and G.J.Crookes together donated 1000 tons of sugar to the Royal Navy in 1940.⁴⁸ Such largesse did not go unnoticed in London. F.Reynolds was knighted in 1915 for his philanthropy, his donation of the Umdoni Park house to the Prime Minister, and his contributions to Michaelhouse, another of Natal's exclusive schools.⁴⁹ In 1923 C.G.Smith was also knighted, so that not forgetting J.L.Hulett, knighted in 1902, and Marshall Cambell, knighted in 1916, the sugarocracy, small as it was,

³⁹ SASJ 2:5(1918), p.1189.

⁴⁰ SASJ 2:4(1918), p.1169.

⁴¹ Osborn, *Great Natalian*. p.97.

⁴² SASJ 42:7(1958), p.567.

⁴³ See for example on C.G.Smith in *Smithlink* 1:4(1977), p.11.

⁴⁴ SASJ 23:12(1939), p.667.

⁴⁵ *South African Sugar Year Book* (1939-40), pp.193-195.

⁴⁶ *South African Sugar Year Book* (1941-42), p.214.

⁴⁷ SASJ 7:1(1923), p.16.

⁴⁸ SASJ 24:1(1940), p.7.

⁴⁹ South African National Society, "The Reynolds of Sezela", 1981. On Michaelhouse, a school founded "especially for the upper and middle classes", see A.M.Barrett, *Michaelhouse 1896-1968*. Pietermaritzburg: Michaelhouse Old Boys' Club, 1969.

could boast four knights in its midst.

The knighting of Natal sugarocrats gave symbolic affirmation of the connections between their quotidian culture and that of the British bourgeoisie which they so closely emulated. This was the way of life that could be held up as an example of the rewards due to those "who worked through the years to bring civilization to a barbarous country".⁵⁰

Ideology, Intellect and Image

Being settlers and colonists, the early sugarocrats drew upon an ideology which had its roots in Victorian Britain and which was further inspired by conditions in Natal; the ruling class ideas of imperial Britain were put into action by these colonial sugarmillers in their combined efforts to foster a social and political climate amenable to their own economic ends. The specific aspects of sugarocrats' ideology which most vividly influenced the development of colonial social relations were those which related to the workings of British imperialism and to the creation and control of a colonial workforce. In other words sugarocrats' ideology was, in colonial Natal, at the very heart of bourgeois state and class formation.

Those ideological currents which could be said to have flowed through the consciousness of all sugarocrats, which originated from the common backgrounds of individual sugarocrats, and which became manifest in their common practices, are posited as the substance of "sugarocratic consciousness". Racism loomed largely as an element of that

⁵⁰ J.Hulett (Mrs W.H.Hulett), "Umdlali - A Century of Progress", Women's Institute, no date, p.36.

consciousness, pervading sugarocratic culture, politics, and employment practices. Yet the existence of racism within sugarocratic consciousness was neither inevitable nor calculated; it was created under particular conditions and used in a particular manner. The origins of sugarocrats' racism can be traced to the sugarocracy's beginnings during the economic and political ferment of early settler colonialism in Natal.

With reference to the British settler community in nineteenth century Natal, the historian Hattersley wrote that

It was impossible to divide people into owners of property and the common herd; for land was so cheap that the humblest emigrant could afford to be proprietor of his own house or farm. Landowning was scarcely a mark of privilege, and business, especially finance and banking, was coming to replace it as the symbol of authority.⁵¹

Such a remark took for granted settler status as a symbol of authority in itself, for while "the common herd" may have carried no "symbol of authority" when facing financiers and bankers, whites in general assumed authority over blacks. Settlers collectively viewed the partly conquered people, whom they claimed to have colonised, as social aliens, as a barbarous, pagan, subject "race". Therefore the latter system of authority which cross-cut the incipient classes in settler society was based as much on the settlers' theory of colonialism as it was on economic criteria.

When Africans put up fierce resistance, their ultimately unsuccessful attempt to repulse the colonists only hardened settler resolve to remain collective, if class-divided, overlords. And as the dynamic of capital accumulation gained momentum in the colony, it did so in typical colonial fashion, with the colonised pressed into the service of the

⁵¹ Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony*. pp.76-77.

settlers. A blend of settler racism and **laissez faire** economic tenets of bourgeois ideology went a long way towards furnishing the rationale for recruiting, coercing, and super-exploiting black workers on a large scale: society was construed as being divided into lower and higher "races", with an attendant hierarchy of rights and privileges; the need was expressed for subject "races" to have inculcated in them a hitherto negligible ethic of industry and work; employers were regarded as having the inalienable right to determine wages and to unilaterally define the rules and sanctions governing virtually every facet of a worker's existence; and black workers were super-exploited in that their wages were inadequate to maintain themselves and their families without recourse to agricultural production in the Reserves. When sugarmillers surfaced as large-scale employers at the economic pinnacle of colonial society, their ideology embraced just such an elaboration of settler racism.

Because it was a social construct without objective or scientific grounds, racism manifested itself with a degree of personal nuance, if not ambiguity. It is later shown that T.Reynolds was not disposed to the political dis-enfranchisement of blacks and to notions of racial hierarchy in the same way as his sugarmilling associates, yet his employment practices earned him more public approbrium than any contemporary sugarmiller. Of course the conditions faced by Reynolds' workers were no different from those condoned on the properties of other sugarmillers. Nevertheless it has been written of the older William Campbell that he followed an "enlightened labour policy...preferring kinder and more intelligent methods of attaining a satisfactory labour output",⁵² and until 1874 no Indian was employed by the Campbells.⁵³ In

⁵² Herd, *Killie's Africa*. p.13.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

another respect, outside the employer/employee relationship, the Campbells certainly did attract acclaim for their relations with Africans. Marshall Campbell was "advisor" to a local Zulu clan, and John Dube once wrote of him that "It was he who brought me before the eyes of the authorities. It was he by his gifts and advice that I was able to carry on".⁵⁴ Campbell and Dube were said to have collaborated in an attempt to keep local Africans out of the fray during the 1906 rebellion,⁵⁵ and refugees were given sanctuary at (but improbably in) Mount Edgecombe House.⁵⁶ Marshall Campbell had shown the same regard for Africans as had his father, but he had been forced out of necessity to use the Indian indenture system which both he and his father had been so critical of. His was a lone voice when it came to defending free Indian workers against the notorious £3 licence, but he was equally keen to see Indians repatriated rather than being allowed to stay in Natal.⁵⁷

Instances of respectful intercourse and paternalistic benevolence notwithstanding, the sugarocrats' ideology either blinded them to, or justified in their own minds, the decidedly oppressive ramifications of treating employees according to "racial" appearances. The manner in which they articulated their racism is seen with reference to the play of imperialist ideals in the making of sugarocratic consciousness.

Imperial connections had some obvious connotations not least of which

⁵⁴ KC, MS CAM 1.04, Folder 12, Dube to Campbell, 24.9.1936.

⁵⁵ Herd, **Killie's Africa**. p.190.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.37; and "Mount Edgecombe Area Annals", Womens' Institute, 1964.

⁵⁷ **Senate Debates**, 1914, pp.424-425 and 498. Gandhi praised Campbell, for the stand he had taken in the Senate, in a number of public statements. See for example M.Gandhi, **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**. Delhi: Government of India, 1964, vol.XII, pp.433 and 465-470.

was the promise of military security for settlers in the face of the newly conquered but far from servile black populace. There were also sources of capital and mercantilist guarantees which, over and above emotional bonds, indebted the Natal sugarocracy to its country of origin. But, for all its acts of submission to metropolitan crown and flag, the nascent sugarocracy had left the fold of the British petit-bourgeoisie and it had an autonomous struggle to wage as a colonial bourgeoisie: it had to engage itself in the formation and workings of a bourgeois state; it had to pursue the objective of creating and then maintaining in servility a supply of cheap labour, without interference from Downing Street; it had to be assured of the political support of white settlers; and it had eventually to arrive at some compromise in its relationships with the ruling settlers in adjacent colonies. How ideology was woven into these pursuits, and how a sugarocratic consciousness began to develop during their execution, may be discovered by tracing the performances of sugarocrats in public office.

The colonial sugarocrats maintained a strong allegiance to Britain, which long after Union was still referred to by some as "home", and their emotional and political expressions were often flavoured by imperialist jingoism. As Rhodes lay on his deathbed in 1902, G.S. Armstrong eulogised that

I have known the right honourable gentleman for nearly 20 years, and I am proud to say that he is a Britisher and Imperialist of the first water. He is the greatest statesman that South Africa has ever seen. He is the greatest Empire-maker that the world has ever seen.⁵⁸

That Armstrong's expressed views on British imperialism and its agents seemed to border on idolatry should not be seen to be out of line with the general sentiments of the sugarocracy towards crown and empire. It was Armstrong also who, on the eve of the unification of the South

African colonies, captured most clearly the sugarocracy's understanding of the implication of having a colonial ruling class whose ideological and material commitments were forged under the shadow of a metropolitan bourgeoisie: although he spoke as "a Britisher and an Imperialist", he argued that

If there is one thing that ought to be left in the hand of [Union Parliament] it is the Native question...once for all we shall have no interference from Downing Street...
I trust that this [Draft South Africa] Act will pass the House, and that we will become a nation equal to none under the British flag.⁵⁹

And the sugarocracy stood firmly opposed, if not to Union, then to any development that might ultimately result in the lowering of the British flag in Natal.

Subjects of real embourgeoisement though they were, colonial sugarocrats did not always see themselves in that light. As they contemplated the unification of their colony with the three colonies abutting it, some voiced their misgivings about the nature of class alliances that might eventuate. From G.S. Armstrong came the warning that "capitalists" were not to be trusted, and that these people in the Transvaal were friendly with "the Dutch".⁶⁰ In the terminology of Armstrong and his colleagues, "the Dutch" and British settlers stood apart as two distinct "races", while mine-owners were "capitalists" and sugarocrats were "farmers". Thus it was with some prescience that J. Kirkman projected the unlikelihood of "racial division" and "I rather think it will be a division on the great lines of country interests, merchants' interests, and magnates' interests".⁶¹ Even if some may already have seen themselves as industrialists and capitalists by the time of Union, the

⁵⁹ *NIA Debates*, Vol. 47, 42-65, 1.4.1909.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *NIA Debates*, Vol. 47, 78-88, 5.4.1909.

colonial sugarocrats had shown themselves to have had a definite pre-occupation with "country interests", which had direct ideological implications. They had pressed in colonial Natal's Legislative Assembly (NLA) for the taxation of absentee landowners, which led to the introduction of a tax in 1908 that caused those affected to dispose of over 20000 acres of land in Victoria county alone;⁶² they urged closer settlement;⁶³ and Hulett had been an especially forceful proponent of leasehold rather than freehold settlement, particularly with respect to Zululand where he argued leasehold would obviate land speculation and unproductive settlement.⁶⁴ Apart from the ideological platform erected in their stand for "country interests" against rentier capital, the colonial sugarocracy was at one with Transvaal's mine-owners when it came to putting ideology to work in the formation and control of a labour supply. The racial division of labour in Natal, to which the sugarocracy was party, had its origins in the structural conditions of the time, but its sustenance was, as is explained in Chapter 5, also mediated by racist ideology.

While sugarocrats contributed to the formation of a colonial working class comprising whites and blacks, they nevertheless espoused the felt need for segregating the colonial populace. The sugarocracy's contribution to segregation took various forms, of which residential segregation on their own properties was but one of the most superficial. They also advocated and claimed to practice preferential treatment for white artisans and clerical workers, and in the colonial Legislative Assembly they lent support to statutory segregation. In 1904, for example, a motion put before the NLA by G.Armstrong was agreed to, which

⁶² *NLA Debates*, Vol.48, 292-306, 3.11.1909.

⁶³ *NLA Debates*, Vol.24, 8-11, 1.7.1903.

⁶⁴ *NLA Debates*, Vol.37, 523-536, 12.7.1904; Vol.42, 81-92, 2.7.1907; Vol.48, 162, 26.10.1909.

would lead to the segregation of Natal's railway passengers. Similar motions had previously come to nothing, but now Armstrong was arguing that "the matter is so important, even to the Native and the Asiatics themselves", and his successful case rested on such observations as this:

I think it is a most painful sight to see European women and children travelling with Indians, and also Natives at times. Only the other day a friend of mine told me that a Chinaman came down on the Main Line travelling in the same carriage as a lady and a number of white children. I think that is a standing disgrace to a colony such as ours. I consider, Sir, that we have a right, as the ruling people of this country, to keep our position, and to see that this intermixing is not allowed on the Railways.⁶⁵

Though they may all have found "intermixing" objectionable, colonial sugarocrats were not unanimous in their disposition towards Africans and Indians in other respects. While they could not concur on the exact means and intensity with which to maintain blacks in subordination, the colonial sugarocrats appear to have shared a tacit acknowledgement of the humanness of blacks. As J.R.Saunders himself pronounced,

I think that the road to the Zulu War was paved with good intentions...playing with the Zulus as if we were dealing with rights as between two civilized nations. Rights between barbarians must be dealt with with full justice, but with a paternal care which is necessary in dealing with such people. If we had acted fairly the War would never have taken place.⁶⁶

And two years later he added that "It is because I like the Zulus, with all their faults, that I seek to expose the evils which surround us";⁶⁷ then with further qualification, "The Zulus are fine jovial grown-up children".⁶⁸ J.L.Hulett had used stronger language in writing that

Nothing less than the complete annihilation of the Zulu power (i.e. as a power) will satisfy the requirements of

⁶⁵ *NLA Debates*, Vol.37, 232-235, 21.6.1904.

⁶⁶ *NLA Debates*, Vol.1, 529-532, 3.2.1880.

⁶⁷ J.R.Saunders, "Natal in its Relation to South Africa", *Proceedings, Royal Colonial Institute* 13(1881-82), pp.103-145.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the Colony; when that is crushed, without the possibility of again rising, we may mould and shape the incongruous mass of barbarism in our midst.⁶⁹

And from Marshall Campbell came the claim in 1911 that "the native who is Christianised and educated, and is not simply a clothed native, is far more useful than a raw kafir".⁷⁰ Colonial sugarocrats as a group thus construed their domination of blacks as a rational consequence of their self-ordained rights and duties as cultural superiors and political rulers. They were nevertheless divided over the precise manner in which racism should be practiced and they differed in their appreciation of the level at which discourse between whites and blacks was considered to be appropriate.

The colonial sugarocracy's opinions on the question of the enfranchisement of blacks were formed in consonance with the ideological communion achieved amongst them with regard to the morality of racist paternalism. Although the sugarocrats were comparatively silent in the Legislative Assembly when the issue was under discussion, J.R.Saunders had in 1880 voiced his support for the dis-enfranchisement of Indians, whom he thought would be "made the catspaw of agitators and others who will lead them into mischief".⁷¹ It was T.Reynolds who had stood out as an exception when in 1882 he pleaded that "The sooner we cast away suspicions regarding the natives, the sooner we let them feel they have a part in the legislature of the country, the sooner we shall arrive at a better understanding about them".⁷² Though the stance taken by Reynolds was ambiguous, the colonial sugarocracy at large clearly recognised, with self interest, the need to exclude blacks from the colonial electorate. It was equally plain that control would not be assured by

⁶⁹ *Natal Mercury* 8.5.1879.

⁷⁰ *Argus* 14.9.1911. Copy filed in KC, P 4291.

⁷¹ *NLA Debates*, Vol.1, 622-623, 24.2.1880. Hulett too had opposed the franchise for Indians (*NLA Debates*, Vol.24, 166-178, 6.5.1896).

⁷² *NLA Debates*, Vol.5, 479-481, 27.7.1882.

this tactic alone.

With typical candour J.L.Hulett had written to his Victoria County supporters in 1879 that

The whole past of native legislation has been barbarous...[we have to]...see that the natives are dealt with upon a basis of civilisation, which cannot be done under the tribal system. Increase the wants of the people; foster their industry, and give them a direct interest in the land - you make them loyal. Their present loyalty is not real, only a sham - fear only; their loyalty is at present to barbarism and kafirdom.⁷³

By supplanting "barbarism" with loyalty, by taking up cultural matters which encompassed marriages,⁷⁴ medicine,⁷⁵ and modes of dress,⁷⁶ by attempting to break down the tribal economy, and by other measures, did the sugarocracy seek to effect control over the recalcitrant Zulus and the resilient Indians of colonial Natal.

In order for the sugarocracy's civilising mission to produce the desired climate for control it meant that the Reserves could not be seen as an end in themselves, nor could Zululand be allowed to remain untouched by the Natal administration. In 1880 J.R.Saunders argued for the exchange of Reserve for Crown lands with the express purpose of deepening the divisions amongst Africans in Natal,⁷⁷ and he also proposed the installation of a Colonial Resident in Zululand whose presence should be financed by a levy on the territory's inhabitants: "you will never make the Zulus realize that anyone is placed over them, unless you make them pay tribute through their chiefs".⁷⁸ Saunders continued his campaign in 1882 to bring Zululand "under the supremacy of British authority,

⁷³ Natal Mercury 23.5.1879.

⁷⁴ NLA Debates, Vol.40, 13-14, 8.5.1906.

⁷⁵ NLA Debates, Vol.28, 340-341, 27.6.1899.

⁷⁶ NLA Debates, Vol.1, 149-152, 4.12.1879.

⁷⁷ NLA Debates, Vol.2, 364-366, 14.12.1880.

⁷⁸ NLA Debates, Vol.1, 529-532, 3.2.1880.

exercised through the agency of white Magistrates".⁷⁹ These were matters which also occupied Hulett, who held the view that "if we want to have a public benefit, something that will be the commencement of a system of better control over the Natives, then we must put ourselves to a slight amount of inconvenience"⁸⁰ (that the registration of Africans would entail). Hulett was no less concerned with the control of Africans within the Mission Reserves. He considered it to have been a "fatal mistake" for the Colonial Government to have allowed African freehold settlement in an Umvoti Reserve, for the Africans in question then leased their land to Indians for large rents and "in consequence are not developing their own intelligence to the extent that they should".⁸¹

Evidently colonial sugarocrats did not always act in concert as employers and as politicians, but this did not imply the absence of a modicum of fundamental ideological unity. Even if they were divided over whether or not Africans were "barbarous", they were not in disagreement over the question of white supremacy in the colony. Thus although there may for example have been some objective significance attached to the Africanist Killie Campbell's insistence that her father Marshall Campbell was not cast in the mould of a typical "Sugar Baron",⁸² there could be no gainsaying his ideological conformity with his sugarocratic contemporaries on the question of black/white relations. As the writer of Marshall Campbell's obituary in the *Natal Mercury* worded it, "Whilst a strong upholder of the white man's supremacy in South Africa, he enjoyed in a unique degree the confidence

⁷⁹ *NIA Debates*, Vol.5, 262, 27.7.1882.

⁸⁰ *NIA Debates*, Vol.27, 678, 1898.

⁸¹ *NIA Debates*, Vol.24, 32-38, 2.7.1903.

⁸² Herd, *Killie's Africa*. p.52.

of our native and Asiatic populations".⁸³ Personal idiosyncracies notwithstanding then, racism and imperialism were the cement of the sugarocracy's ideology.

The sugarocracy's ideology did not simply unfold in the course of time. It was also actively impelled by intellectuals within the sugarocracy, and its adherents and advocates had their ideological (and class) position defined in a number of written works. By considering now three specific issues - the intellectual pursuits of certain sugarocrats, the creation and projection of a sugarocratic image, and the development of sugarocratic historiography - it is shown how the ideological legacy of the colonial sugarocracy remained embedded in the collective "sugarmillers' consciousness", and how it was put to practical use.

From the early stages of its history the sugarocracy could be said to have had a fertile intellectual source within its own ranks. It is particularly with members of the Saunders lineage in mind that this point is made. J.R.Saunders, attributed as the progenitor of the Indian indenture system in Natal, was like many other sugarocrats a politician; he also wrote letters to the colonial press, and in 1882 addressed the Royal Colonial Institute in his capacity as a fellow thereof. This speech of his in London concerned the relationship between Natal and the rest of South Africa, and he argued against uniting the British and Boer territories in South Africa.⁸⁴ Interestingly W.Campbell also addressed the Royal Colonial Institute in the same year, his subject being postal communication between Britain and India and Australia.⁸⁵

⁸³ **Natal Mercury** 21.4.1917.

⁸⁴ Saunders, "Natal in Relation to South Africa".

⁸⁵ W.Campbell, "Postal Communication with the East; India in Six and Australia in Sixteen Days", **Proceedings, Royal Colonial Institute** 14(1882-83), pp.223-246.

J.R.Saunders' intellectual mien was clearly based on an engagement with some of the central issues of state formation and ruling class ideological ferment in general, and in this regard his son Edward was no less of an intellectual figure. Edward Saunders played a leadership role in the formation and running of the NSMA, of SASA, and of BEPO; he also held office in the FCI and he once represented his constituency in the Union Parliament.

Saunders' involvement with BEPO was crowned by his book **A Self-Supporting Empire**, which was published in London at the end of World War I.⁸⁶ There he gave support to the plea his father had made for a greater awareness in England of the "history and potentialities of the Empire".⁸⁷ His professed mission in this regard was to provide a blueprint for a "self-supporting empire" maintained by research, planning, and imperial protectionism. Some of the measures which he advocated were the establishment of joint industrial councils and the greater application of science to agriculture in order to "set the labourer free from the treadmill that exhausts the body and dulls the intelligence."⁸⁸ These devices would, he claimed, contribute to "the true solution for the Capital and Labour difficulty [which] is to give every workman the opportunity of becoming a capitalist".⁸⁹ Turning to South Africa, he cautioned that

the white population must be safeguarded from the tendency to degeneration which shows itself in a labour market liable to be flooded with masses of coloured workers.⁹⁰

And as for African workers, he considered that

everything depends upon utilising them not only in a

⁸⁶ E.Saunders, **A Self-Supporting Empire**. London: Nisbet, 1918.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.180.

manner beneficial to themselves but so as to prevent them becoming serious competitors with the white race.⁹¹

There in a nutshell were the contradictions of which the sugarocracy was always aware it had to resolve both practically and ideologically: fostering a protected and progressive industrial environment while simultaneously preventing the de-colonisation, in body and in mind, of black workers.

The intellectual endeavours of the sugarocracy in the period before World War II were, it is suggested, of a "holistic" bent in that they were carried on as appeals to an imperial bourgeois audience at large, with seldom any overt consideration for their personal empires. This did not of course detract from the importance of those efforts for local and company affairs, but it did represent a wider scope in the application of intellect from that of subsequent sugarocrats. After World War II, company and general sugar industry business were more decidedly at the forefront of intellectual pre-occupation, although questions of state and polity were never neglected. This may be illustrated by reference to the image which the sugarocracy formed of itself to be beholden by others.

It would appear that the image consciously projected by the sugarocracy was initially an expression, to themselves as much as it was to others, of the sugarocracy's ascent to the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Because they saw bourgeois rule in cultural terms as much as in economic or power terms, they also saw themselves as being rationally destined to provide leadership as well as being objectively dependent on control over workers. Black workers in particular had to be presented with an image of the sugarocracy that would command respect and loyalty; they

⁹¹ Ibid., p.142.

had to be convinced that sugarocratic control, justified by ownership, cultural superiority, and masterly status, was the rightful role of the sugarocracy. The paternal side of the early sugarocratic image was linked to a sense of being on a civilising mission, and it rested on axiomatic ideas in sugarocratic consciousness about the child-like mentality of blacks. Where this image, and invective, led to nought, discipline was enforced by coercive measures which were nevertheless consonant with the notion of cultural superiority and with bourgeois expectations of worker submission. As Genovese argued, such heavy handed paternalism was a compromise between a demand for servility and a recognition of the humanness of workers (albeit simply a recognition of their capacity for resistance and rebellion).⁹²

After the termination of the Indian indenture system, and even more so since the late 1930s, the sugarocracy seemed concerned to shed the coercive aspect of its image. As is shown in Chapter 7 their paternalism became more sophisticated as they tried to replace coercion with benevolence, and quiescence among workers was increasingly sought through "community building" - improved housing, sponsored and organised recreation, support for religious activities, and so on.

There was a certain amount of ambiguity surrounding this shift taken by the sugarocracy in its image-building. What is clear is that the attempt to bring benevolence into the image projected by the sugarocracy did not imply an abandonment of racism, an elitist notion of power and rule, and metropolitan bourgeois culture, as guiding ideological principles. The ambiguity arises when consideration is given to the links which appeared, at the time of the shift, between the sugarocracy

⁹² E.D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, *passim*.

and the short-lived journal **The Industries of South Africa**. On the one hand the journal, published in Durban, might have had the appearance of a forum for progressive ideas: it carried interviews with G.B.Shaw after his visit to South Africa;⁹³ a paper by the liberal historian Edgar Brookes offered "Some Clear Thinking on the Native Question";⁹⁴ A.Geo.Champion wrote to its editor "May God give you many more days to express the truth";⁹⁵ it had a correspondent in the USSR who contributed glowing articles on such topics as the position of women in that country; and it frequently dealt with the Natal sugar industry. On the other hand the journal was banned from Natal schools by the province's Superintendent of Education, and its editorial policy was blatantly to fan the flames of fascism:

We think that the only hope of salvation that South Africa has lies in the bringing about in this country of an Industrial Fascism under a Dictator. This is what every true South African should work for.⁹⁶

Was the regular advertising in the journal of Sir J.L.Hulett & Sons Ltd, Natal Estates Ltd, and C.G.Smith & Co Ltd of any significance? More germane to this discussion, did the sugarocracy intend to project an image of an affinity with fascism? Was the frontpiece photograph, in the first edition of the **South African Sugar Year Book** in 1930, of W.E.R.Edwards, the Hulett empire's strongest general ever, beneath the caption "The Mussolini of the Natal Sugar Industry", something of a clue in this respect? The sugarocracy's practices during the inter-war years (detailed in the following chapters) provides an affirmative answer to these questions, and certainly D.Saunders was said not to have shied away from the appellation of fascist.⁹⁷

⁹³ **The Industries of South Africa** (September and October, 1935).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, (December 1935), pp.33-35.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, (July 1936), p. 21.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, (August 1933), p.23.

⁹⁷ P.L.van den Berghe, **Caneville: The Social Structure of a South African Town**. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964, p.66.

Until the 1930s then, the projected image of bourgeois and "master" had been attended by a paternalism which encompassed expectations of "servants"; it was a paternalism which had the sugarocrats dispensing negative sanctions freely, without ever laying any store by positive sanctions. Although the change was neither rapid nor evenly manifested within the sugarocracy, the image began to shed its more despotic aspects from the late 1930s. This transformation of the sugarocrats' image was first witnessed in Tongaat in the wake of D.Saunders' assumption of control in 1934, and at a time when the wide-spread slums in the district had deteriorated to appalling levels. Other sugarmillers did not immediately follow suit when Saunders began his humanitarian drive to give Tongaat a face-lift.

Because such a change of attitude, or of the image projected, needed to be backed by monetary expenditure, sugarmillers may have postponed it (had they at the time considered it worthy of undertaking). Apart from the difficulties imposed by World War II, sugarmillers had to bear in mind the implications of the statutory eight-hour working day and the prospect of Industrial Council wage determinations. Under these circumstances sugarocrats generally still followed the hard-line they had taken as "masters". It was only from the late 1940s that the example set by Tongaat was seen to begin spreading through the sugar belt, and the sugarocracy maintained an overt interest in improving their employees' material conditions through the buoyant and profitable 1950s.

By the late 1960s the image of sugarocrats as benevolent employers had undergone further, but subtle, changes. Paternalism persisted, while cultural pluralism was projected as the chosen alternative to racism as a principle of management in the sugarmills and villages. Whereas the

early sugarocrats had initially created an image of themselves to affirm their embourgeoisement, they had later turned to creating an image of themselves which was conducive to the imperatives of production. The image of the sugarocracy had thus been assigned a place in production relations *per se*, and it was nurtured *via* sugarocratic historiography.

Early sugarocrats had left their impression on Natal's cultural landscape in a variety of ways, some consciously contrived and others not. For example, KwaMashu - "the place of Marshall" - is named after Marshall Campbell. Another artefact attributable to him and to E.Saunders is rickshaw transport in Durban, which they initiated by importing a consignment of the vehicles from Japan.⁹⁸ Apart from legacies such as these, sugarocratic families have consciously endeavoured to uphold the image projected by their forebears. This they accomplished by means of biographies, usually written with the assistance of other parties close to the sugarocracy.

In the first place there was the work of R.F.Osborn, who might be said to have been the sugarocracy's official biographer and historian. His **Valiant Harvest**, published in 1964 by SASA, was widely distributed to libraries, senior sugar company employees, and elsewhere. **Valiant Harvest** was intended to have a sequel, but the draft of "Sweet Concord" never went to print because of Osborn's death.⁹⁹ Both texts had very little to say of sugarmill operatives employed by "the men who have established and developed the Sugar Industry".¹⁰⁰

Two other books written by Osborn were the biographies **C.G.; A Great**

⁹⁸ Herd, Killie's Africa. p.27.

⁹⁹ The SASA library holds the manuscript of Osborn's Sweet Concord.

¹⁰⁰ "Foreword", in Osborn, Valiant Harvest.

Natalian. A Biography of Sir Charles George Smith KCMG, KSJ, JP, and This Man of Purpose, A Biography of Sir James Liege Hulett KtB, JP. As the titles suggest, these books conveyed faithfully the images which the respective sugarocrats had themselves successfully projected; now by virtue of the not disinterested publishers, the images were placed on record for the edification of later generations. The latter biography was based in part on a text compiled in 1957 by J.M.Hulett to commemorate the centenary of Hulett's arrival in Natal; this text had in turn been based on Eric Rosenthal's unpublished manuscript biography of Hulett. J.M.Hulett later also had a hand in editing **This Man of Purpose**, which was published by her husband. In 1982 another Hulett descendant, Kearsney principal H.E.Hopkins, abridged **This Man of Purpose** into "The South African Connection of the Hulett Family", the publication of which was sponsored by the Hulett family and the Hulett Corporation to commemorate the 125th anniversary of J.L.Hulett's arrival in Natal. Whereas C.G.Smith had no direct descendants and his biography was posthumously published by C.G.Smith & Co., J.L.Hulett's image was guarded by his descendants by means of the written and re-written word. Indeed, the Hulett biography itself acquired a history with the air of a saga about it.

Another printed edifice to the sugarocracy was **Flower Paintings of Katherine Saunders**, published by the Tongaat Group in 1979 to commemorate its 60th year as a public company in South Africa. Between the covers of the lavish volume were printed a 90-page biography of James Renault and Katherine Saunders, penned by their great grandson, the brother of Tongaat's chairman; and reproductions of K.Saunders' flower paintings. This book was announced in its preface, written by C.J.Saunders, as "a tribute to the pioneers of all races and creeds, who in one way or another helped to establish Tongaat and to build our

country". The preface also included a proclamation of the oft-repeated "Tonga philosophy".

The "Tonga philosophy" was a particularly powerful ideological device which made explicit links between the sugarocratic image, paternalism, and company policy. It was most completely detailed by R.G.T. Watson in his **Tongaati: An African Experiment**, which was at once a biographical treatise on the Saunders family and a manifesto and rationalisation of company philosophy. Watson's book, more fully and explicitly than others, was what sugarocratic historiography was all about: the portrayal of sugarocrats in majestic profile; the parading of their ideology as the font of rationality, objectivity, and progress; and the justification for sugarocratic claims to authority.

Clearly the partisan biography was an important means of establishing a sugarocratic "tradition". Of greater import for the maintenance of that tradition have been the **SASJ** and the magazines published by the various sugar companies. The **SASJ** was, during its early years, the official organ of the South African Sugar Planters' Union. It was in the **SASJ** that the opinion was expressed in 1930 that certain sugarocrats had not paid their dues:

Sir Frank Reynolds, who departed from the Sugar World at the end of September, left about a quarter of a million sterling, made entirely out of the Sugar Industry; yet not a penny has he left to benefit the industry to which he owed so much. In this he merely emulates his predecessors, Sir Liege Hulett, Sir Marshall Campbell and a few others.¹⁰¹

The **SASJ** had previously not always been favourably disposed to the sugarocracy, and until the late 1930s its editors remained closely aligned with growers in their disputes with the millers. After World

¹⁰¹**SASJ** 14:10(1930), p.665.

War II the journal contributed to the maintenance of the sugarocratic image by showering praise in obituaries, historical articles, and contemporary reports.

The relevant house journals are **Hulett's News** (incorporating **KwaHulett's**), **Hulett's Review**, Tongaat's **The Condenser** and **NkosiBomvu**, **The Illovo Digest**, and **Smithlink**. If the books put out by the sugarocracy were not intended for sugarmill employees, then these journals were. Besides conveying company policy and heralding company growth, most, and particularly **The Condenser**, have portrayed company founders in an aura of heroism. Lest the image were to fade, the portrayal has served to remind employees thereof. And that image has been central, if a reading of the journals is anything to go by, to the cause of promoting (in the case of **NkosiBomvu** by its very name and by regular quizzes) amongst employees a sense of community and identification with sugar companies, even if today they operate under the umbrella of Anglo-American and Barlow Rand.

When, as in the following chapters, the implications of sugarocratic domination are examined more closely, it becomes clear that sugarocratic ideology and its portrayal via sugarocratic historiography served to distort and conceal aspects of reality. In particular, the reality of class embattlement and workers' experiences under the sugarocratic yoke were concealed by the pens of the sugarocracy's historians and intellectuals. Though such concealment may sometimes have been nothing more than unconscious "silences" or a symptom of cultural myopia, at other times, but especially after World War II, it became as intentional as institutionalised political activism.

Political Life

A convenient means of discussing systematically the sugarocracy's involvement in political institutions is to look at the animation of the "sugarmillers' consciousness" from two perspectives: the sugarocracy's dealings with sugarcane growers; and the sugarocracy's approach to relations with the state. The finer details of miller/grower politics have been analysed in the previous chapter, and the following discussion concentrates on the political life of the sugarocracy outside the sugarmilling environment *per se*. Although the sugarocracy's endeavours in political institutions are being approached here in terms of "state politics" and "sugar politics", it is quite apparent that the distinction relates only to the different agencies concerned.

Natal's sugarocrats had stood as a powerful lobby in the Colonial Government, and within the post-colonial party-political sphere the sugarocracy was consistently supportive of the South Africa Party (SAP) and its successor the United Party. Six of the eight most prominent sugarocratic families had members elected to office in colonial government, amongst other sugarmillers: T.Reynolds and his son Frank represented Alexander County at different times; J.L.Hulett once beat E.Saunders at a general election, and he was successfully returned when he shared an anti-Responsible Government platform with T.Groom and W.Campbell in the 1892 general election;¹⁰² and G.S.Armstrong, J.Saunders, M.Campbell, and C.G.Smith all held seats in the Colonial Parliament. After Union these sugarocrats cast their lot with the SAP. Moreover F.Reynolds and G.S.Armstrong were elected SAP Members of Parliament within a few years of Union, and C.G.Smith, who replaced Reynolds as Senator in 1921, was the Natal leader of the Party until his

¹⁰²See Herd, *Killie's Africa*. p.26.

resignation in 1930, when he was made life president of the SAP. Both J.L.Hulett, who had been colonial Minister of Native Affairs and later the Speaker of the House, and M.Campbell served as Union Senators, and W.Pearce was Durban County's Member on the Provincial Council. Apart from this direct involvement of sugarocrats in the affairs of state, G.Hulett was made a Union Senator in 1917; J.L.Hulett's son in law, W.Clayton, became a Senator after having twice been colonial Minister of Agriculture, and having represented Zululand as SAP Member of Parliament; and F.Reynolds' son, Lewis, was honorary assistant private secretary to General Smuts before filling the seat for Natal Coast as SAP Member of Parliament. The only departures from the obvious political leaning within the sugarocracy were seen in the ineffectual attempts made in 1929 by G.Hulett and W.Campbell to rally support in Natal for the National Party.¹⁰³

During the colonial period the political work of sugarocrats revolved around larger issues of state formation as much as around their day-to-day concerns as employers, millers, and planters. If this was apparent from their postures in the Natal Legislative Assembly, it was even more evident in their involvement with the Indian Immigration Trust Board. They had always been represented on the Board, but since the turn of the twentieth century they predominated,¹⁰⁴ being thus effectively in a position to determine the parameters within which they could operate as employers of Indian workers. Their strength in this respect was bolstered by the successes of individual and collective campaigns to secure themselves as millers-cum-planters: the campaigns for the

¹⁰³SASJ 13:8(1929), p.469, and 13:12(1929), p.815.

¹⁰⁴By 1907 E.G.Saunders was chairman of the Indian Immigration Trust Board, and J.L.Hulett, C.P.Reynolds, and A.Platt were amongst the six other members of the Board. The following year also saw C.G.Smith and E.W.Hawksworth on the board. See also Chapter 5, Note 39.

extension of the Indian indenture system, for mercantile protection, for railway construction and an expanded customs union, for the taxation and control of Africans, and for the settlement of Zululand by whites, were all pursued in search of a guaranteed future for millers-cum-planters in face of foreign competition and local constraints.

The intensity with which certain sugarmillers had engaged themselves as politicians in colonial Natal had almost inevitably assured them places in the early Union Senate. It is remarkable that the only sugarmiller to stand for and be elected to parliament after Union, who had not been a member of the Colonial Parliament, was E.Saunders. Post-colonial sugarocrats were seemingly inclined to divorce the pursuit of their economic objectives from that of their political objectives, concentrating their energies on the former. When they dealt with the state now it was through direct deputations, and their general attitude was one of resisting any form of state interference.

After Union the sugarocracy by and large fell within the ranks of the SAP, by which allegiance they hoped to maintain Natal as a relatively autonomous dominion province, while expecting also a protective dispensation for the industry. Their approach to involvement with the state reflected their position of having two hats to wear, that of the agriculturalist and that of the manufacturer. This inherent ambiguity was seen in the way in which after Union sugarmillers related to Botha as "a man of the land", and to Smuts as the proponent of their wider political aspirations; it was more vividly evident from the changing relationship they had with planters when the industry as a whole dealt with the state.

If in the period before the late 1930s sugarmillers had (as the previous

chapter shows) related to growers from an obsessively defensive position, they had done so with the state too. Like exemplary exponents of *laissez faire* economics, they had resisted any form of state intervention, while growers had worked in the opposite direction. The organisations behind which they had stood, and the work of those organisations, bore testimony to the search for sugarocratic autonomy. Through BEPO they had sought to secure imperial preference for their products, without working through the state, and they had hoped to keep miller/grower relations confined to SASA, in which they participated as members of what was undoubtedly the strongest party, the NSMA. In the background to these organisational activities, the sugarocrats had also mobilised around an ideological campaign to advance their interests as industrialists. This campaign, which linked their concern for autonomy with their protectionist ideals, was manifested in their affiliation to an offshoot of BEPO, namely the South African Federated Chamber of Industries (FCI).

The nature and extent of the sugarocracy's immersion in the politics of protectionism appears not to have been fully appreciated by social historians. Within the context of her analysis of the ideology and ideologues of manufacturing in South Africa before state protection was firmly secured, when the Labour-National Party Pact came to power in 1924, Bozzoli mentioned J.L.Hulett but ignored E.Saunders.¹⁰⁵ While there is no question as to Hulett's importance as an ideologue, and even as a protectionist, when the articulation of "manufacturing ideology" was institutionalised with the creation of the FCI in 1917, Saunders' contribution overshadowed anything that the 80 year old Hulett did or

¹⁰⁵B.Bozzoli, "The Origins, Development and Ideology of Local Manufacturing in South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1:2(1975), pp.194-214.

might have done in this sphere.

Saunders has been acknowledged for making the original proposal by which the idea of a federated chamber of industrialists was defined,¹⁰⁶ and he served two terms as the FCI's president, first in 1919/20 and again in 1933/34.¹⁰⁷ Saunders' mission was unambiguous: to unite manufacturing, agriculture, and labour in "an industrial Parliament, capable of putting united propositions to the Government which would be impossible to turn down!".¹⁰⁸ Sugarmillers in general were party to this cause and the NSMA had three representatives on the FCI's Executive Council until 1936.¹⁰⁹

This direct form of participation by sugar producers in the FCI was altered in 1937, from which time SASA instead of NSMA nominated three representatives as executive councillors. Although this still meant that sugarocrats such as W.A.Campbell and G.V.Crookes maintained a presence in the FCI, the attendance of sugar industry representatives at the Federation's annual conventions began to decline after 1939. Formal SASA representation was not made after 1950, except for the two terms served by C.J.Saunders in the early 1960s. Flagging interest in bureaucratic or executive involvement in the FCI coincided with an improvement in the export market and rising domestic demand for sugar.

The extremely volatile history of sugar politics in the pre-World War II period was followed by the relative calm of the post-war period. The only policy-related sugar institutions remaining after the War were SASA and its constituents, SACGA and SASMA. In the post-war climate of

¹⁰⁶FCI Viewpoint (50-year Commemorative Issue) 1:6(1967), p.30.

¹⁰⁷SASJ 19:1(1934), p.15.

¹⁰⁸FCI Viewpoint (50-year Commemorative Issue) 1:6(1967), p.30.

¹⁰⁹This and the following details on sugarmillers' involvement in the FCI have been drawn from **Annual Reports, SAFCI**.

sugarmillers' prosperity little was publicly seen or heard of the rapidly thinning sugarocracy in the party political sphere, and only C.J.Saunders came to the surface in political life. An interview with Saunders reported by the **Financial Mail** in June 1982, had it that he claimed to have "no stomach for politics".¹¹⁰ Saunders was nevertheless at the time Natal chairman of the Urban Foundation, a member of the Buthelezi Commission, and a member of both the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and his Defence Council.¹¹¹ No less significant was the political role played by Saunders, in the company of other members of the old sugarocratic families, on the eve of the referendum for South Africa's white electorate over the question of the proposed new constitution. By the time of the referendum, on 2nd November 1983, Saunders had sought and received wide publicity in the media for his propagation of a vote in favour of the new constitution.

Summary

As self-made capitalists, the first sugarocrats in Natal set in motion a distinctive culture. In every sense - from the quotidian way of sugarocratic life to the politics and consciousness of the sugarocracy - their culture was bourgeois yet sectarian, dynamic yet conservative. They saw themselves and applied themselves as ideologues; they affirmed their real embourgeoisement by projecting an appropriate image; and their intense patriotism did not stop at the threshold of military action.

Changes in aspects of the culture of the sugarocracy mirrored the

¹¹⁰**Financial Mail** 29.1.1982, pp.431-432.

¹¹¹*Ibid.* See also D.Lincoln, "State, Capital and the Reserve Consolidation Issue in South Africa", **Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie** 73:4(1982), pp.229-236.

structural changes outlined in Chapter 2. From an early stage in the sugarocratic era their perceived obligation to intervene personally in the processes of state formation and social reproduction became less pressing than it had been towards the end of the nineteenth century. Despite an underlying commitment to the rationalisation of bourgeois power and rule, the sugarocrats' main concern moved away from the politics of bourgeois rule, and closer to the source of their economic strength, the sugarmills. The sugarocrats' overt concern for the politics of the work-place became all the more evident when the severe production and distribution crises of the inter-war period sapped their political energies. An important aspect of this shift was the move from creating a bourgeois image, to mobilising that image. After World War II the sugarocracy remained pre-occupied with bourgeois control at the level of the state as well as the work-place, but now it was seen to have adjusted its social theory from one predisposed towards a rapacious racism, to another which was ostensibly given to meritocratic ideals.

This insight into the culture of the sugarocracy prepares the way for a study of the sugarocracy's employment practices; it provides clues about the range of expectations sugarocrats might have had of their employees, and about the manner in which they might have responded if those expectations were not met.

PART TWO

THE SUGARMILL

CHAPTER FOUR

SUGAR TECHNOLOGY AND THE TECHNICAL DIVISION OF SUGARMILL LABOUR

It is within the sugarmill that a sugarocracy lays first claims to authority over its employees. It is here that a sugarocracy exerts an influence over the way in which a contingent of appropriately equipped operatives is assembled and set to work with the appliances and machinery of the sugarmill to produce sugar and profits. Neither the division of labour nor the technology at the disposal of operatives can remain stagnant under a capitalist mode of production: the workforce undergoes re-division and technology is constantly revised in order to optimise the conditions which favour the highest possible return to owners in an ever changing economic context. However, the particular division of labour at any one time imposes certain limits on technological change, and various technologies in their turn impose constraints on the division of labour in the sugarmill. There is thus a mutual interdependence between the changing configuration of the workforce and changing technology; both changes being related the form taken by bourgeois intervention in that dynamic relationship.

In this chapter the sugarmilling labour process in Natal is approached **via** a general historical account of sugar technology and the division of sugarmill labour. The Natal case is then treated chronologically, with emphasis given to the technical division of sugarmill labour, technical training, and technological change respectively.

Sugar Technology and the Division of Sugarmill Labour

The process of sugarmaking involves several basic operations: crushing the sugarcane; clarifying the juice thus obtained; evaporating water

from the juice by boiling; crystallisation; and "purging" the molasses adhering to the sugar crystals. Until the introduction of steam mills these operations were undertaken, often simultaneously, either solely by humans or by various combinations of human and animal, water, or wind power.¹ Whatever the source of motive power in these early sugarmills though, human manual labour of a most arduous nature was always implied.²

Historically speaking, sugarmill industrialisation could only be achieved by first transforming the workforce from slaves to wage-labourers. That is to say, technological changes alone could not progressively raise the productivity and profitability of slave-operated sugarmills. Representing as they did a form of capital, all slaves were required to be productively occupied at all times in order to reduce planters' expenses to as close as possible to the fixed cost of maintaining and controlling his slaves.³ This imperative; the difficulty of regimenting skilled slaves due to the incompatibility

¹ An arbitrary set of data show the degree of variation in sugarmill prime movers during the eighteenth century:

		Animal	Water	Wind
Jamaica	1768	369	235	44
Tobago	1775	52	9	23
Mauritius	1776	1	1	1

Data on Jamaica and Tobago from L.J.Ragatz, **The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833**. 1928. Reprint. New York: Octagon Books, 1971; and on Mauritius from R.Lamusse, "The Economic Development of the Mauritius Sugar Industry", **Revue Agricole et Sucriere de l'ile Maurice** 43:1(1964), pp.22-38.

² For a brief but informative essay on pre-industrial sugarmills, which deals with sugar technology and the division of labour, see W.Barrett, "Caribbean Sugar-Production Standards in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries". In **Merchants and Scholars** edited by J.Parker. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965.

³ This imperative has been termed "Genovese's rule" by R.V.Anderson and R.E.Gallman, "Slaves as Fixed Capital: Slave Labor and Southern Economic Development", **Journal of American History** 64:1(1977), pp.24-46. It has been observed in sugar production by E.V.Goveia, **Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the end of the Eighteenth Century**. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980, pp.126-129.

between bondage and the autonomy acquired by artisans;⁴ the related issues of educating slaves and entrusting to them an entire sugarmill containing sophisticated machinery - these factors, either jointly or severally, militated against technological change in sugarmills where there was a preponderance of slaves.⁵ For the late eighteenth century Cuban sugarmiller, as an example, this condition was a virtually insurmountable obstacle; he was

A castrated, impotent semi-bourgeois, with merchandise and market like the revolutionary bourgeois who intellectually inspired him, but self-contradictorily forced him to chain himself to the past in order to survive.⁶

As committed as he was to reaping the profits attainable on the world sugar market, this "semi-bourgeois" Cuban sugarmiller had to contend with a sugar output ceiling which hovered at 1,15 tons of sugar per slave per season from the end of the sixteenth to early in the nineteenth century.⁷

That slavery was a stumbling block with respect to technological change seems clear, although purely technical constraints did exist,⁸ for example in the widespread use until the early nineteenth century of vertical rollers made of wood. These mills set limits which could only be broken by the use of horizontal iron mills of greater mass and with greater crushing surfaces. Then there were the open copper vessels for evaporation which required manual labour to stir and to clear scum from their boiling contents; they too placed a constraint on sugar recovery.

4 Goveia, *Slave Society*. p.131.

5 M.Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976, *passim*, but especially p.112 where he wrote of machinery being "too complicated" for slaves.

6 Fraginals, *Sugarmill*. p.18.

7 *Ibid*.

8 Of course the availability of capital was also a critical factor, as emphasised by S.W.Mintz, "Labor and Sugar in Puerto Rico and in Jamaica 1800-1850", and E.V.Goveia, "Comment", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1(1958-59), pp.273-283.

Significant change in sugar technology came in the mid-nineteenth century principally **via** the use of steam and the application of principles of thermodynamics and kinetics.⁹ It was steam power which drove enlarged horizontal mills, and in the sugar house (or boiling house) the previously used copper kettles were replaced by two steam-related appliances, the multiple effect evaporator and the vacuum pan. These innovations were developed and operated on the principle of boiling syrup below 100°C by reducing pressure over the syrup. Boiling under vacuum prevented the formation of caramel, it enabled a finer grain to be produced, and it made for dramatically improved final recovery. Multiple effect evaporators and vacuum pans (operated separately from the evaporators to boil away remaining moisture and to promote crystallisation) doubled production immediately in the sugarmills into which they were introduced in the mid-eighteen hundreds.¹⁰ During the late eighteen hundreds a further advance was made with the introduction of centrifugal machines. The "massecuite"¹¹ leaving the last vacuum pan could now be subjected to high-speed rotation in finely perforated metal baskets, whereby the separation of molasses from crystallised sugar could be completed.

The above developments notwithstanding, sugar yields per sugar canes crushed had not been markedly increased. What had been achieved was an

9 Except where otherwise specified, technical descriptions of sugarmills operating between the mid-1800s and World War II have been drawn from N.Deerr, **The History of Sugar**. 2 vols. London: Chapman & Hall, 1949; Fraginals, **Sugarmill.**; and G.A.North Coombes, **The Evolution of Sugar-Cane Culture in Mauritius**. Port Louis: General Printing & Stationery, 1937.

10 In Mauritius the average output per sugarmill more than trebled during the two decades 1843-1863, after vacuum pans and evaporators were introduced on a wide scale (North Coombes, **Evolution**). Multiple-effect evaporators were introduced with the effect of fuel- and labour-saving, and the average working day was shortened (A.H.Adamson, **Sugar without Slaves**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, p.187).

11 Literally "cooked mass".

increase in sucrose recovery from the available juice; it required the arrangement of a series of mills in tandem to raise the amount of juice extracted from sugarcane. This innovation of the late nineteenth century, and the introduction a few decades later of shredders and knives to the mill house, made a significant impact on sugar recovery.

By the time these foregoing developments had had their effect in the sugarmill, a number of critical qualitative changes to the sugarmill's workforce had taken place. In the first place there was the replacement of slaves by wage-labourers. Another crucial transformation was the elimination of the sugar master, for

Until then production had depended on the technical expertise of the sugarmaster, but the very word "sugarmaster" betrays its feudal origins. These masters had operated within the limits of traditional functions known as "mysteries", which only professionally experienced initiates could penetrate. Large-scale production required that the veil that concealed his own process of production from a man's eyes should be torn away...¹²

in those regions affected by the presence of these masters, who were "the despair of mill owners".¹³ Their place was taken by scientifically trained sugar chemists. And in response to the installation of vacuum pans there surfaced the pan-boiler whose skills were, ironically, acquired by sensory experience.

Quantitatively, the immediate needs for unskilled manual labour tended to grow as each increase in the volume and tempo of production was effected.¹⁴ So the sugarmill, which once had a small troop of people

¹² Friginals, *Sugarmill*. p.61.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ This general growth was not even. Australian sugarmills were never as labour-intensive as other colonial sugarmills, and sugarmills in Mozambique employed twice as many labourers as Zululand sugarmills in the early twentieth century (*SASJ* 1:1(1917), pp.299-309, and 1:2(1917), pp.135-139). See also F.Maxwell, *Modern Milling of Sugar Cane*. London: Norman Rodger, 1932, p.309.

working the mills and supervising the crushing and processing procedures, now had a workforce which included manual labourers and their overseers, skilled artisans and their foremen, pan-boilers, as well as sugar chemists.

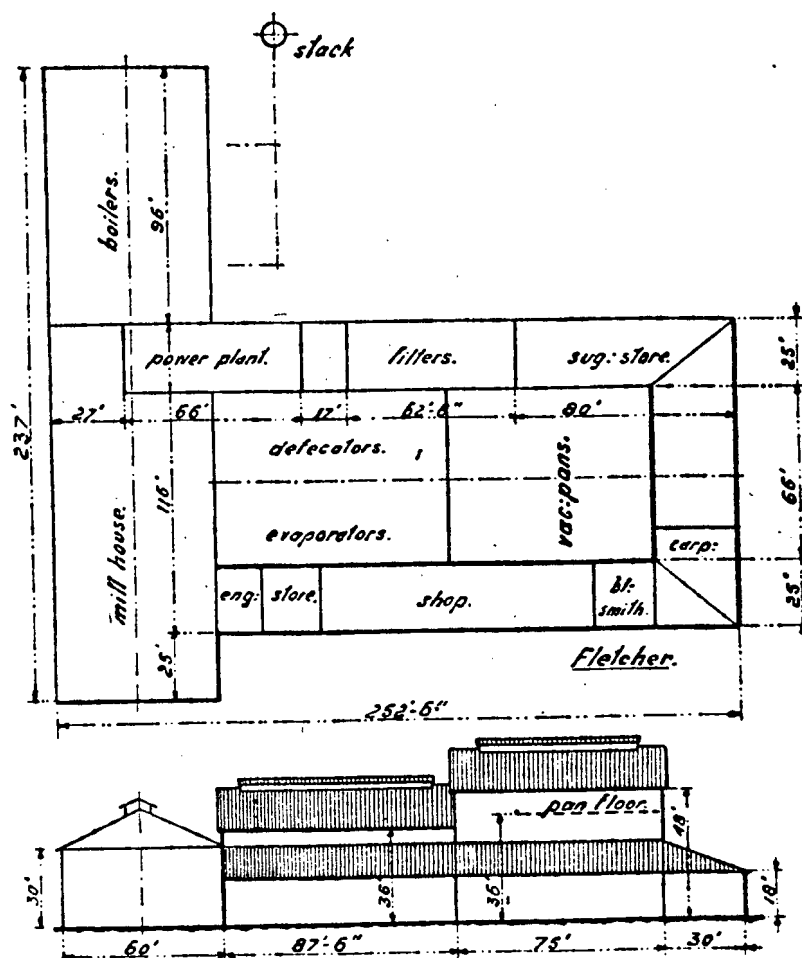
This brings the historical sketch to shortly before World War II, when a relatively large sugarmill producing sugar for direct consumption would typically have functioned as follows:¹⁵ the entire sugarmill is accommodated in a single building complex comprising the cane house where sugarcane is unloaded; the cane carrier house protecting the cane carrier; the mill house; the boiler house (and if bagasse is used as fuel, a bagasse store house); the sulphur and liming house; the clarification house; the filter-press house; the evaporator house; the vacuum pan or boiling house (which is distinct from the boiler house); the centrifugal and crystalliser house; the sugar dryer and store house; and the power house. The arrangement of such a sugarmill is depicted in Figure 7, which shows an elevated pan floor beneath which are situated the centrifugals.

Sugarcane arriving at the sugarmill is crushed and the juice flows from beneath the mills, along a sloping gutter, and into a strainer where trash ("cush-cush") is removed. The juice then passes through measuring or weighing equipment in order to record accurately the amount of sucrose about to be processed. Lime is now introduced to the juice as a reagent, and sulphur is used as a bleaching and coagulating agent.¹⁶

¹⁵ This description is taken from L.A.Tromp, **Machinery and Equipment of the Cane Sugar Factory**. London: Norman Rodger, 1936, *passim*. Only the most important stages in the process are outlined and no reference is made to condensing equipment, boilers, the various types of pumps used, the various carriers and elevators, the scales, imbibation equipment, or the intricacies of pan-boiling such as the re-introduction of run-off from first boilings.

¹⁶ Deerr, **History**. p.578 has details on the use of sulphuring and liming.

FIGURE 7: 1000-TON SUGARMILL, BRITISH DOMINIONS, c 1935
(Reproduced from L A Tromp, *Machinery and Equipment of the Cane Sugar Factory*. London: Norman Rodger, 1936, p 81.)



After the juice and lime-milk mixture has been heated in juice heaters to about 100°C , it goes into defecators and/or settling tanks where insoluble impurities are partly eliminated. Sulphitation or carbonatation processes are then used to further clarify the juice.¹⁷ Thereafter the juice enters filters containing various filtering media. The last stage of filtration is completed by using animal or vegetable char. Now the juice is pumped first into the evaporators, where sucrose is concentrated by a continuous process, and then, as syrup, into the vacuum pans where the sucrose is crystallised in discontinuous batches.

¹⁷ The relative costs (including wages) of these two processes were calculated by H.C.P. Geerligs, *Practical White Sugar Manufacture*. London: Norman Rodger, 1915, Chapter 6.

The contents of a vacuum pan are boiled under reduced pressure until they reach a critical degree of concentration. The pan is then "grained" or "seeded" by the introduction of some form of seed crystal. These crystals absorb sucrose and their size thus increases. Once full of concentrated sucrose crystals the pan is ready to be emptied. By means of a "strike" the "massecuite" is discharged from the pan into open crystallisers where cooling is hastened by mechanical stirring. This cooling promotes the growth of crystals and ensures higher sugar recovery. Thereafter the massecuite passes into the centrifugals, and following that the sugar crystals are purged of any remaining molasses. Finally the sugar is dried and then packed.

Technological refinements have proceeded apace since World War II, with attendant changes in occupational categories: the craft of sugar-boiling, for one, has over the last two decades been practically dispensed with, following automation in the sugarmills of the world's leading sugar producing countries. But the most distinctive feature of the post-War sugarmill is not so much automation as the scientific research that precedes technological change. This latter development has had a far-reaching effect on the division of labour in sugarmilling as well as on modes of control.

Although many technological advances are based on the cumulative ideas of anonymous sugarmilling personnel, many of the earlier inventions were made by individuals who were immortalised in the annals of sugar making. So, for example, Charles Howard is attributed with the invention of the vacuum pan in 1813,¹⁸ and Norberto Rillieux invented the evaporator in

¹⁸ Deerr, *History*. p.559.

1840.¹⁹ Rewards for innovations were paid by milling bodies and occasionally by other agencies: the chemist Dutrone was reported to have been paid 6000 **livres** by the French government in 1792 for his improved method of purification;²⁰ and there is documentation of commissioning and rewards in the British Caribbean colonies.²¹ Research and development have since been taken under the mantle of the larger national and multinational corporations, notably Tate and Lyle,²² or they proceed at research institutions which have been established in most leading sugar producing countries. Research results are disseminated in a number of specialist journals and at local or international conferences - a far cry from the disparate investigations of yesteryear and the arcane practices of the sugarmaster. An entirely new field of work has thereby been appended to sugarmilling, adding a corps of permanent scientists to the total sugarmaking workforce, and modifying once again the division of labour.²³

Furthermore, the division between technical experts and manual labourers means very often a division between settlers or expatriates on the one hand, and the local populace on the other. Because racism has reigned

19 Rillieux had a tragic history in that he, "A free man of color...revolutionized sugar production in Louisiana by his work on sugar machinery" (E.D.Genovese, **Roll, Jordan, Roll**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p.390), yet he was forced into exile in Paris "when the slights to which his African ancestry exposed him determined" (Deerr, **History**. p.566).

20 S.T.McCloy, **French Inventions of the Eighteenth Century**. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1952, p.80.

21 Ragatz, **Fall of the Planter Class**. p.62 ff.

22 See G.L.Beckford, "The Economics of Agricultural Resource Use and Development in Plantation Economies", **Social and Economic Studies** 18:4 (1969), pp.321-347; and L.Turner, **Multinational Companies and the Third World**. London: Allen Lane, 1973, *passim*.

23 It is of incidental interest to note current research into small-scale processes accessible to and manageable by relatively unskilled groups of owner-operatives. See for example D.J.C.Forsyth, "Appropriate Technology in Sugar Manufacturing", **World Development** 5:3(1977), pp.189-202; and G.B.Hagelberg, "Appropriate Technology in Sugar Manufacturing - A Rebuttal", **World Development** 7:4(1979), pp.893-899.

prominently in the ruling class ideologies of sugar-producing countries, these divisions have been accentuated in methods of exploitation and control. To some extent these divisions are also indicative of the relative superiority of some sugar-producing countries in the fields of training and research; that is, sugar experts from countries which are most advanced in these fields are found in the upper echelons of sugarmill staffs in many so-called Third World countries. In these latter countries, where the means and feasibility of autonomously creating a training and research infrastructure are sometimes non-existent, a condition of dependency is fostered such that in the perhaps extreme case of the Nzoia sugarmill in Kenya, a huge deficit in the 1978/79 season was attributed to "abnormally" high salaries paid to expatriate technical personnel.²⁴

From Plantation to Industrialised Sugarmilling in Natal: 1850-1905

Colonial Natal's first sugarmill, that established by Morewood, was in February 1852 a simple affair incorporating a small hand-operated mill and an iron pot for boiling less than fifteen litres of juice at a time.²⁵ The crushing mill, which had been imported to Natal in 1851, was kept in motion by four African workers.²⁶ The juice issuing from the mill was collected in buckets which were then emptied into a cast-iron pot standing over an open fire. The syrup in the pot was manually stirred and cleared of scum as it evaporated and converted into sugar. During 1852 the mill's driving gear was altered to permit the substitution of animal power for human effort,²⁷ and the sugarmill was

²⁴ *Africa Economic Digest* 1:6(1980), p.12.

²⁵ W.C.Holden, *History of the Colony of Natal*. London: Alexander Heylin, 1855, p.300.

²⁶ R.F.Osborn, *Valiant Harvest: The Founding of the South African Sugar Industry 1848-1926*. Durban: SASA, 1964, p.19.

²⁷ KC, M 32741, Marshall Campbell.

further improved by the installation of three iron boilers, **inter alia**.²⁸ A contemporary description had it that

the sugar manufacturing house was a respectable building, substantially built, and covered with galvanized iron...

at the back of which four Kafirs are seen turning the crushing-mill, each being at the end of a long arm, to which it is designed to attach a creature with four legs instead of two, when the works are more complete. One man also appears putting the canes into the rollers, and a boy is taking them out after they have been pressed. From these rollers a spout is placed, through which the saccharine flows into a vessel inside the house, and is thence taken to the boilers, where, after having passed through its various processes, it is placed in the coolers, the molasses are run off, and a beautiful crystal sugar remains behind.²⁹

By 1859 there were 16 oxen being used, a pair at a time, to turn the three rollers from which juice "flows along zinc gutters in a thick puddly stream into the boiling house".³⁰ The techniques employed in a slightly modified contemporary sugarmill, that of William Joyner, were more fully described thus:

The crushing machine was drawn by cattle-power. The juice was run off into an iron tank and then into pans (5 in all) and the fire made under all of the pans and in the smallest pan the syrup boiled until the proper consistency for sugar. The syrup was skipped from one pan to another. When the smallest pan of syrup boiled to the proper consistency it was put into lead trenches and then put into boxes with holes and these were drained over the treacle tank. Now the other pans of syrup were skipped in the first small pan and boiled. The boys were kept busy skipping over the syrup and removing the scum while boiling and throwing it away. They used what they called "a brush". A piece of wood shaped like an oar with a long pole handle and that used to help to skip the syrup from one pan to another. The flow of syrup had to be supervised as the pans could only take a small quantity at a time. As one pan was emptied, more syrup was allowed to flow in. The scum was removed with a tool made like a very large spoon with holes in it. The wet sugar was allowed to drain out until it was a beautiful yellow sugar. It was dug out with spades and spread out to dry until ready to

²⁸ Holden, **Colony of Natal**, pp.298-299.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.290 and 297.

³⁰ A.F.Hattersley, **The Natalians: Further Annals of Natal**. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1940, p.81.

bag. There were two bags needed, the outer and inner bags. The outer bag was made from a flat rush plaited together and was called a "Vacuum bag".³¹ The inner bag was like a coarse hessian and was called a "Gunny bag". The two bags were put together and the sugar was put into the gunny bag and sewn up and then the vacuum bag was sewn up. These were loaded on to an ox-wagon and sent to an agent...in Durban.³²

Disregarding the few water- and tread-mills, which in any event lapsed quickly into obsolescence and eventual disuse, sugarmills erected during the 1850s and 60s reflected the confidence and ambitions of their owners. Each planter milled his own cane and although built so soon after Morewood's simple sugarmill, theirs were technologically far superior to his prototype. For instance, in 1855 steam-driven centrifugals had been installed at the Springfield Sugar Estate,³³ and in 1856 a complete steam mill was imported into the colony.³⁴ Besides the appearance of steam engines and centrifugals, juice clarifiers, Wetzel evaporators, and other novelties were also introduced by Natal's sugarmillers during the 1850s and '60s.

According to an estimate made by Babbs in 1856, a sugarmill containing a steam engine, three batteries, and six centrifugals, would have been appropriate for a 200 acre plantation. In order to prepare the land for sugarcane cultivation on this estate, a manager, 6 white ploughmen, 6 black "drivers" (or foremen), 6 black span leaders, 6 black pugglers (to clear the ploughs), and 24 additional black workers were deemed to be required. During the first cutting season a sub-manager would be taken on, and thereafter he and the manager together would administer the

³¹ This should undoubtedly read "Vacoa bag", referring as it does to the type of cane bag which originated in Mauritius.

³² SASJ 30:12(1946), p.635.

³³ Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**. p.52. According to A.Coqui, **Practical Remarks on the Colony of Natal**. London: Effingham Wilson, 1857, p.19, these centrifugals reduced the time taken to make sugar from 3 weeks to 24 hours.

³⁴ SASJ 32:2(1948), pp.73-79.

entire estate.³⁵ While this was a conjectural estimate, Babbs' former estate actually had in 1866 the personnel employed at the wage rates shown in Figure 8. Plainly skill divisions were few in the plantation sugarmill. The most significant material divisions were that between African and Indian workers, and that between the manager and his assistant, on the one hand, and seasonal employees on the other.

FIGURE 8: TYPICAL NATAL SUGAR PLANTATION'S WAGE BILL, 1866

ANNUAL WAGES		
1	MANAGER	£250 plus commission on sugars
1	ASSISTANT	£96
MONTHLY WAGES		
1	ENGINEER	£12
1	PLOUGHMAN	£ 8
138	INDIAN WORKERS	£70
	plus RATIONS	£85
50	AFRICAN WORKERS	£25
	plus RATIONS	£10

Source: Trustees Report on the State of Insolvent Estates..., Durban, 1866.

A particular pattern was evident in the spatial deployment of the workforce in the larger sugarmills. Morewood's sugarmill had been an indoor/outdoor establishment, yet on a simple enough scale to be easily supervised by a single person. Later sugarmills had their various operations partitioned off from one another or separately housed. Hence Robinson's interest with three of the sugarmills which he visited in 1870:

The millhouse [of Mrs Isabelle] is one of the very few in Natal where one can see the whole operation of cane-crushing and sugar-making carried on under one roof. M Collard [the manager] has pulled down all partitions,

³⁵ Coqui, *Practical Remarks*. pp.38 ff.

and standing in front of the engine - a beautiful machine by the way - the eye takes in at a glance battery, coolers, wetzels, centrifugals, and drying house.³⁶

William Campbell's sugarmill was also then under one roof,³⁷ and similarly at Canonby

The mill-house is a model of orderly arrangement, the whole process being carried on under one open roof. In a corner on a raised gallery stands the vacuum pan, the first erected in the colony.³⁸

The positioning of the above-mentioned vacuum pan on a raised gallery was the first step taken towards the vertical expansion of the sugarmill. Subsequently evaporators and centrifugals were also elevated and the boiling house was situated on a platform above the level of the mills. Full advantage of gravity could thus be taken to convey massecuite and sugar in the final stages of processing. This vertical expansion also meant that the workforce was deployed in such a way as to necessitate a more elaborate system of supervision than that which was to be found in the smaller sugarmills.

The 1870s were characterised by extensive experimentation. During that decade a number of sugarmills were for example fitted with "concreters", which enabled them to turn out a compacted substance containing all the molasses usually expelled from sugar. Another case of unsuccessful experimentation in the 1870s was the use by some of the smaller millers of imported Samson or Croncher mills and evaporators.³⁹ The futility of these ventures notwithstanding, the techniques of sugarmilling were in general greatly improved during the decade, principally by virtue of vacuum pan technology. In 1870 there were three sugarmills fitted with

³⁶ J.R. Robinson, **Notes on Natal: An Old Colonist's Book for New Settlers**. Durban: Robinson & Vause, 1872, p.13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.107.

³⁹ Osborn, **Valiant Harvest**. *passim*.

these, and by 1873 vacuum pans were to be found in 12 Natal sugarmills.⁴⁰

While many of the small sugarmills did not have the technical attributes referred to above, the larger ones had crushing capacities way in excess of cane available on respective plantations. Various other factors, not least of which were certain millers' ineptitude or undercapitalisation,⁴¹ contributed to make the largest ones the nucleus of a centralised sugarmilling system. It was not a coincidence then that 1878, the year in which the first successful centralised sugarmill began crushing at Mount Edgecombe, also marked the peak in the number of sugarmills in Natal. The construction of the Mount Edgecombe sugarmill signalled a turning point then in both miller/planter relations and in technological advance. It represented the beginning of the transition from plantation to industrial sugarmilling.

However, as well disposed as they may in general have been to making alterations to their plant, there is at least one report that not all sugarmillers in Natal had the scientific acumen and inclination needed to optimise the use of this plant or to initiate significant changes themselves: from responses to a questionnaire administered in 1885 the conclusion had been drawn that

The Natal sugar planter appears heretofore to have been, on the whole, a plodding mortal not aspiring to exact methods, to fractional figures or too many scientific tests, he has been content as a rule to put in his cane much as his neighbours did, he treated his cane crop with as much science as he devoted to his sweet potato crop; he hauled his cane crop and crushed it by methods more or less primitive and expensive, and as a whole the small miller and the grower is not much in advance of what he was some 10 or 15 years ago.⁴²

⁴⁰ SASJ 1:2(1917), p.97, 1:10(1918), p.733.

⁴¹ See Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*. *passim*.

⁴² W.Y.Campbell, *The Natal Sugar Industry*. Durban: P.Davis & Sons, 1885, p.11.

What needs to be taken into account, when confronted by such ambiguity over the question of the nineteenth century sugarmiller's status as innovator, is that while individual plantation owners may well have been "pre-scientific" in their approach to technology, the owners of the larger sugarmills certainly kept up with the momentum of change in global sugar technology by bringing to Natal whatever machinery was currently available abroad. Put another way, technological change had occurred in Natal's larger plantation sugarmills, but it owed more to exogenous influences than it did to inspiration or sound technical knowledge amongst colonial sugarmillers.

Apart from the ambiguous status of the sugarmiller in the realm of scientific research and application, there was also little change being effected in the organisation of the sugarmill's workforce to suggest that the plantation system was on the wane. Two outstanding features of the plantation were its system of labour organisation - labour intensive work performed by gangs of unskilled workers - and its almost unitary workforce - sugarmill and field workers interchangeable and a very small minority of skilled employees tied to the sugarmill exclusively. The former feature had its origins in a system of exploiting unfree labour under coercive surveillance, and the latter mirrored the fact that despite an incipient dualism towards the end of the nineteenth century, between fields and sugarmill, the plantation was organised around labour-using rather than labour-saving principles. What technological change did occur in the plantation sugarmill could be reduced to two essentials - the replacement of men by mechanical motive power, and the stepped-up output and quality of sugar by means of wetzels, vacuum pans, and centrifugals - but neither was necessarily intended to nor had the result of pruning the workforce. Indeed, although its organisational

principles continued to reflect the operation of a plantation system, a number of additional occupational divisions had arisen in the sugarmill by the mid-1880s. Since these new divisions were to be seen primarily amongst managerial and skilled personnel they related to white rather than black employees. In 1885 the complement of white personnel on a Natal sugar plantation, and their wage bill, were typically made up as shown in Figure 9.

FIGURE 9: WAGES OF WHITE SUGAR PLANTATION STAFF IN COLONIAL NATAL, 1885

MANAGER	£200-600 pa	plus house; one or two horses, stabling and feed; at least one black servant
SUB-MANAGER	£10-20 pm	plus the above perquisites
OVERSEER	£8-12 pm	plus some but not necessarily all of the above perquisites
MILL MANAGER	£10-15 pm	plus some but not necessarily all of the above perquisites
ENGINEER	£10-15 pm	plus some but not necessarily all of the above perquisites
SUGAR BOILER	£10-20 pm	plus some but not necessarily all of the above perquisites

Source: W Y Campbell, *The Natal Sugar Industry*. Durban: P Davis & Sons, 1885, Appendix IX.

The transition from the plantation to the centralised sugarmill was, in the first instance, reflected in technology rather than in work relations. In other words, the newly emerging division of labour in the late nineteenth century sugarmill rested on the organisational principles of the plantation but at the same time embraced categories of work and modes of supervision born of the industrialisation process. This observation is borne out by a document pertaining to the first successful centralised sugarmill at Mount Edgecombe. The manuscript is reproduced *verbatim*, from the original by a Mauritian manager, in Figure

FIGURE 10: MOUNT EDGECOMBE SUGARMILL'S PRODUCTION COSTS, c 1900

Estimation approximatively of Coast price for One Ton of Sugar Manufactured at Mt Edgecombe Mill			
This expenses calculated by 26 days of work per month			
Mr Dumat salaries	about	£	2 8 0
Renault	"		11 6
Morel	"		9 2
Herisson	"		9 2
Liston	"		9 2
D.Pottier	"		4 7
Sidamaron	"		4 7
Hiss	"		6 1
250 Coolies at 1/	"		12 10 0
30 "	1/6 "		2 5 0
20 "	2/ "		2 0 0
Food for Magass mules and keep in good order the Magass Carts			12 0
Unforseen at £20 per month			13 0
		£	23 8 9
Making 10 Tons sugar per day Expenses being £23.8.9. Shall be for one Ton say £2.4.0.			
At this amount I added for repairs machineries £2000.0.0 upon a Crop of Tons 2000. Say for one Ton £1. or per day for 10 Tons			
			10 0 0
		£	33 8 9
Say £33.10.0. Coast price for 10 Tons of Sugar			
Now: Crushing ten Tons the share for the Mill will be $\frac{2}{5}$			
or 4 Tons at £14 the Ton say.....£ 56. 0.0			
Expenses for 10 Tons as over.....£ 33.10.0			
Profit for the Mill per day			
Manufacturing 10 Tons £ 22.10.0			
I will obser(?) you that this amount of £2000.0.0 for repairs the machineries & is very high.			
Now: As Saccharine Estate belong to the same Cpy than Mt Edgecombe the price of ten Tons of Sugar at £14. equal.			
		£	140 0 0
Expenses for manufacturing 10 Tons		£	33 10 0
Cutting & loading for 10 Tons the man at /1 a day			14 5 0
Carting for 10 Tons. 14 Carts at 10/.	4 days		28 0 0
Int(?) Manager & asst.	" "		2 12 0
Net profit for the Company by ten tons of Sugar from Saccharine Estate Sugar Cannes.			78 7 0
		£	61 13 0
I believe, if my figures are correct that the Cpy has a profit to continue to crush Saccharine Estate Cannes, as bad she are.			
Yours obediently			
(signed) Henry Duboisee			

Source: KCM, 32762, Sir Marshall Campbell.

10. Especially noteworthy were the divisions between skilled workers (all Mauritians) and undifferentiated Indian workers - a legacy of the plantation; and the separation of field accounts from those of the sugarmill, and the discrepancy between sugarmill and field wages - both signs of industrialisation in progress.

The Centralised Sugarmill in the Making: 1905-1914

The beginnings of centralised sugarmilling in Mount Edgecombe implied a large outlay on mechanical and processing plant. By the early 1890s, most sugarmills had phased out open batteries and Wetzel evaporators and already employed double crushing and vacuum pans,⁴³ but Mount Edgecombe embodied even grander devices, notably its 6-roller mill, the first in Natal. As Table 3 shows with reference to Tongaat, another early sugarmill to install a 6-roller mill, the consequences of enlarged milling capacity were impressive. What the investment of capital in centralised sugarmills had initially brought about was a gulf between the small, technologically circumscribed plantation sugarmill and the large, technologically progressive sugarmill. In the former, the limits to technological change were mainly functions of capital for by all accounts their owners had been enthusiastic innovators where new machinery was concerned.⁴⁴

Within the larger sugarmills the division of labour was quite consistent with that outlined by Maxwell.⁴⁵ A process complementary and related to

⁴³ SASJ 1:2(1917), p.97.

⁴⁴ See P.Richardson, "The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905: An Interpretative Essay", *Journal of African History* 23:4(1982), pp.515-527.

⁴⁵ F.Maxwell, *Economic Aspects of Cane Sugar Production*. London: Norman Rodger, 1927, Chapter 11, outlined the division of sugarmill labour in selected regions, the Hawaiian model being similar to the Natal case.

TABLE 3: EFFECT OF ENLARGED MILLS ON SUGAR RECOVERY
AT TONGAAT SUGAR CO, EARLY 1900s

	MILLING PLANT	AVERAGE CANE TO SUGAR
1899-1905	6 rollers	15,30
-1907	9 rollers	13,15
-1909	11 rollers	10,06
-1921	16 rollers	9,77

Source: TAD, K39, Vol 5, Company Submission to Sugar Inquiry Commission, 1922.

the division of central sugarmill labour was that whereby the regimen of work was being changed, mainly with a view to raising productivity without incurring the costs of improved technology or increased wages. By the early years of the twentieth century some of the larger sugarmills were worked in two shifts in order to crush continuously around the clock during the cane-cutting season. In some cases extra men were added to mill feeder, boiler and centrifugal gangs to facilitate shift work by allowing always one out of every ten labourers to be at rest.⁴⁶ At Mount Edgecombe, for example, before the introduction of twelve-hour shifts in 1908, the working day of sugarmill personnel began at about 3 a.m. and ended at about 7 or 8 p.m..⁴⁷ And until about 1910, there were general attempts being made by sugarmillers to lengthen the working day of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1908.

⁴⁷ SASJ 10:12(1926), p.785.

⁴⁸ M.Tayal, "Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14:4(1977), pp.519-547.

An apt *entrée* into the centralised industrial sugarmill, and the peculiarities of its occupational hierarchy, is available in the form of a diary kept during the construction of one of these at Sezela.⁴⁹ The diarist, E.Camden Smith, was responsible for construction which began on the eve of World War I. Once the sugarmill was functioning he was to be Sezela's chief engineer. In the initial stages, eighty Africans and thirty Indians dug foundations and laid concrete, while six white artisans applied their skills to other immediate objectives, including the erection of brick cottages which would eventually be their own accommodation. The division of labour by skin colour/skills presented no qualitative change from the plantation arrangement, nor did the location of the white workers' cottages on a hill overlooking the black workers' barracks which were adjacent to the low-lying site of the sugarmill. In addition to residential separation, and also in keeping with the plantation system, whites and blacks received differential forms of payment such that all Africans, irrespective of expertise or productivity, were paid 35/- a month, while whites were paid according to their respective trades ranging from 10/- per day for the handyman to 18/- per day for the bricklayer.

By exercising close supervision, the diarist was able within a few days of the beginning of cement-laying to achieve some economy in the use of labour. His initial success in terms of raising productivity must have been offset though as a result of subsequent altercations with workers. Exactly a month after the first shovels of sand had been dug he encountered

5.6.1914 Trouble with [African] gangs at breakfast time. Want Saturdays off. Palaver. Agreed to do weekly task of 75 barrels [of cement, presumably] to each gang. Lungele. Blacksmith did a bunk at dinner time...
In afternoon, one carpenter was taken off foundation

⁴⁹ E.Camden Smith, "Diary of Construction ISEZELA May 1914 - May 1916".

work & put on to finish native barracks, lack of accomodation[sic] having been one of main causae belli this morning.⁵⁰

It is not clear when or under what circumstances the workers left the site, but within three weeks of this confrontation the African workforce had been halved, and the diary read

26.6.1914 Labour supply short:- 40 men (i.e. 4 gangs) concreting (all of whom clear out when their daily task is finished at about 1.0 P.M.); 18 at stonebreaker; 6 bringing sand; 6 or so odd jobbers; about 12 unloading cement.⁵¹

Demands on the white workers had by this time also increased and both carpenters daily worked overtime. These labour difficulties were conveyed to Crookes, and a few days later an extra gang of Indian workers was taken on, only to strike (with about six Africans) and be dismissed within the week.

His necessary pre-occupation with labour gave way from about this time to a greater concern with the minutiae of mechanical plant installation, and here we take leave of the diarist. Once the sugarmill was functioning, it obviously did so with a qualitatively different and much expanded workforce. But the rules of stratification remained unchanged. Topped by the engineer himself, the personnel pyramid had a broad base comprising unskilled black workers and an intermediate layer of white artisans. Newly inserted into the hierarchy were the process staff - pan-boilers, chemists, and overseers. The occupational hierarchy aside, the engineer here personified the transformation from the plantation to the centralised sugarmill - in him was vested complete authority over sugarmill erection and operation, over technology and operatives.

The status of the engineer as factory manager was directly related to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the relative importance attached to milling over processing. Engineers dominated within the sugarmill's occupational hierarchy, and all the more so because improved sugar recovery was still generally a consequence of increased milling efficiency rather than contingent on chemical control.

Responding to Global Crises: 1914-late 1930s

World War I disrupted the supplies of mechanical plant and chemicals to Natal,⁵² and in any event expenditure was generally circumscribed by the war-time restrictions on sugar sales. When the restrictions were lifted in 1919, most sugarmillers gave vigorous attention to technological change.⁵³

The more important technological changes were made at the extraction stage of the production process. Most sugarmills had their mills adapted to cope with the Uba variety of cane. Uba, valued for its resilient qualities in face of local climate and crop pests, was far more fibrous and of smaller diameter than other varieties.⁵⁴ This necessitated special grooving in mill rollers as well as elaborate arrangements of milling tandems, usually to incorporate at least one single or double crusher before the mills themselves. Largely because of the ubiquitous cultivation of Uba then, milling tandems commonly included one or two sets of knives before the crushers, and sometimes shredders between the crushers and the mills. In the largest sugarmills this combination of knives, crushers, shredders, and milling train was

⁵² Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*. p.107.

⁵³ R.F.Osborn, "Sweet Concord", unpublished ms.

⁵⁴ A.McMartin, "The Early Days of the Natal Sugar Industry, with Special Reference to the Introduction of Varieties", *Proceedings, SASTA* 22(1948), pp.83-89; and G.S.Moberly, "The Replacement of Uba by New Variety Canes from 1936 to 1944", *Proceedings, SASTA* 19(1945), pp.29-34.

duplicated so as to have two tandems operating simultaneously. The use of two tandems, which gave the advantage of reduced breakdown or overhaul time, was later taken up in other large sugarmills. Within a milling tandem there was thus a range of mechanical devices and attendant workers to be maintained and controlled.

While the expansion entailed in making these changes went on beneath a single roof, the sugarmill retained its compartmentalised structure of sequential "houses" and allied workshops as recorded by Tromp.⁵⁵ However, whereas in 1870 the absence of partitions had meant that the entire sugarmill was conveniently placed under the purview of the owner or manager, each "house" or workshop now had its own foreman or overseer. In other words the arrangement of the various sugarmilling departments was paralleled by a spatially organised system of surveillance over machinery and personnel; a system for which the engineers were ultimately responsible.

The role of the engineers as custodians of machinery and its operatives was still based on labour-using rather than labour-saving principles. Although by the time the sugar industry began to respond to the lifting of war-time restrictions in 1919 most sugarmills were worked in three 8-hour shifts instead of the earlier two of 12 hours each,⁵⁶ this did not mean that the intensity of labour-use was declining - it implied in some cases a renewed attempt to lengthen the working day in that a worker had to work every second shift. Despite the tempo of new investment in mechanical plant, manual work was still regarded as an important component of the production process. Thus, for example, the view was still held in some quarters that

⁵⁵ Tromp, *Machinery and Equipment*.

⁵⁶ SASJ 3:4(1919), p.239.

the old, if expensive method of hand feeding is undoubtedly the best. By hand feeding may be secured that even supply of cane which makes for regular crushing.⁵⁷

As far as the training of workers for more skilled positions was concerned the approach taken by sugarmillers was quite consistent with the image they had gained for themselves, during the colonial period, of being ready spenders on new plant, but inept exponents of scientific principles. There had certainly been no place for skill training in the indentures period, nor were migrant workers ever considered worthy of expenditure in this respect. As the employers saw it,

the practice of natives returning to their homes after only four months of continuous labour makes it difficult to impart useful training to them and to depend on them as a source of labour supply.⁵⁸

Nevertheless some few - invariably Indian - workers had learnt skills in the nineteenth century sugarmills which stood them in good stead after the expiry of their indentures. These exceptions apart, the Board of Trade and Industries had in 1926 detected a generally "inefficient" use of labour by sugarmillers, and related it to the way in which "the executive minds of the industry have not entirely thrown off a certain bias in favour of low-paid labour and a consequent tolerance of its shortcomings". The Board also recommended that more apprentices be taken on, especially "sugar men".⁵⁹ Two decades later another Board of Trade and Industries Report made reference to the lack of training facilities in the sugar industry for operating personnel and executive staff, and an unfavourable reliance on Mauritius and Louisiana in this regard.⁶⁰ In the interim, the conditions of the Fahey Agreement had

⁵⁷ R.F.Hutcheson, "The Milling of Uba Cane in Natal", SASJ 10:3(1926), pp.165-171.

⁵⁸ KCM, 32759, Sir Marshall Campbell, File 10, Natal Sugar Association (Private).

⁵⁹ Board of Trade and Industries, Report N^o 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry**, 1926.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

created the need for trained planters' chemists.

The 1926 Fahey Agreement gave rise to the need for some fifty cane-testers and laboratory assistants. This the sugarmillers did not initially see as their problem - in fact, whether they realised it or not at the time, they stood to benefit from the source of technologists that the planters' cane-testing service would provide. What was at the time of growing concern to sugarmillers was chemical control; although not yet universally applied, it was by the time of the world sugar crisis in the mid-1920s generally recognised for its important contribution to improved final recovery. Thus when the demand was created for planters' chemists, sugarmillers took the opportunity to collaborate to a very limited extent in the establishment of common training facilities for sugar house apprentices and cane-testers, the limitation being that they were reluctant to make any expenditures towards the scheme.⁶¹

The basis for the planters' cane-testing service was laid by the Moberly Report of 1927, which recommended a hierarchy of personnel comprising supervising chemists earning £25 per month, testers earning £12 or more per month, and "young reliable Indians" as laboratory assistants earning £4 per month plus rations.⁶² A four-year course was inaugurated in 1928 to provide theoretical training for sugar house personnel and cane-testers during the annual off-crop. The SACGA employed two lecturers to give the course at the Technical College in Durban, and 45 students were registered, 12 from the milling companies and 33 SACGA employees.⁶³ The students who joined the scheme, and those that succeeded them in the

⁶¹ See for example A. Hammond et al **South African Cane Growers' Association: The First 50 Years**. Durban: SACGA, 1977, p.82.

⁶² SASJ 11:3(1927), pp.147-149.

⁶³ **Proceedings, SASTA** 2(1928), p.74.

following years, were not certificated on completion of their course of studies, but they were encouraged to write the sugar technology examinations of the City and Guilds of London Technical Institute. Whatever their degree of success in their theoretical education (very few ever passed the London examinations) the candidates were seasonal employees who received either half of their normal wages or no pay at all during the off-crop. Their few prospects for promotion offered no consolation.

Moreover, when promotion came it did not necessarily imply a bright future. As a chemist lamented in 1927

the life is a hard one with plenty of work and very little comfort or society at most sugar factories. Twelve hour days - or even six hours on duty and six hours off of strenuous monotonous work seven days a week is the rule, and the climate often far from healthy or bracing, and the moderate pay, for all except the more responsible posts, is no great recompense.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the sugarmills were obviously relatively more appealing for qualified cane-testers than work in the growers' cane-testing service. By 1930 already 22 men had left the cane-testing service for the sugarmills.⁶⁵ Despite this flow of qualified testers into the sugarmills, the deterrents to prospective sugar house personnel loomed large and in 1935 the president of SASTA made the suggestion that "The industry itself will have to train such men, first catching them young" and then also providing work for them during the off-crop.⁶⁶

The significance of the sugarmillers' concern with the recruitment of sugar house personnel was that the question of chemical control and

⁶⁴ H.H.Dodds, "The Sugar Manufacturing Industry: General Review from the Standpoint of a Chemist", *SASJ* 11:1(1927), pp.43-49.

⁶⁵ "Report of Committee on Training of Sugar House Apprentices", *Proceedings, SASTA* 4(1930), pp.108-110.

⁶⁶ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 7(1935).

contingent improvements in sugar recovery had taken on similar importance to expanded milling capacity. Having re-assessed their priorities in this way, and having then also weathered the depression during the early 1930s, sugarmillers were poised to review their thinking on the utilisation of labour.

While the new-born imperative of chemical control necessitated an increase in the number of laboratory and sugar house personnel under the supervision of chemists and factory overseers, respectively, possibilities for marginally reducing the number of workers employed in the mill house were presenting themselves. Control over prime movers could be taken from the hands of individual drivers to become increasingly centralised and electrically operated. A case in point was the Mount Edgecombe sugarmill where electrically driven mills were first put to use in the early 1930s.⁶⁷ This made possible centralised control of the milling train, and a single operator was thus able to start up or stop the entire milling tandem. The need for labour to oil the mill engine was at the same time almost eliminated.⁶⁸

The spur towards a systematic policy of labour-saving in the sugarmills was provided by anticipated legislation for an 8-hour day which, as the president of SASTA noted in his 1937 address, would make it necessary to reduce labour costs.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ **Natal Mercury** 15.6.1932.

⁶⁸ J.B.M. Godfrey, "Electrical Activities of Natal Estates", **Proceedings, SASTA** 8(1934), pp.103-128.

⁶⁹ "President's Address", **Proceedings, SASTA** 12(1937).

The Sugarmill during the War and the Post-War Period of Expansion:
late 1930s-1962

For the period until 1940 there is only fragmentary material available on the division of sugarmill labour, some samples of which have been displayed above. An obstacle to generalisation from such data is the lack of uniformity among sugarmills: each company had its own approach to management, and not all owners were equally forthright when it came to divulging information about company operations.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the quantitative aspect of the division, in terms of the numbers of employees in the various categories, remained obscured. The year 1940 did not herald a new dispensation as far as the publicity of company information went; rather, it was workers who had to be attributed with precipitating an outpouring of relevant information.

The two years leading up to the time in 1942 when the first Wage Determination was made for the sugar industry represented a vital stage in the history of the sugar industry. In November 1940 the Natal Sugar Industry Employees' Union (NSIEU) appealed to the Department of Labour's Wage Board to conduct an investigation into the wages and conditions of employment of sugarmill workers. The Wage Board responded positively and immediately to the plea. Employers and the NSIEU alike were canvassed for recommendations regarding wages and occupational descriptions, giving the Union the opportunity to press for higher wages, especially for assistant pan-boilers (who in smaller sugarmills

⁷⁰ The Board of Trade and Industries, Report No 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry**, 1926, observed how experimental information was "jealously withheld". Another illustration of this secrecy was the practice of not revealing the names of sugarmills in any technical reports. The NSMA only consented to disclose sugarmill names for the first time in 1948.

reported directly to factory overseers or managers), platen hands, motor vehicle drivers, head sirdars and indunas, and unskilled workers. The employers' requests ran counter to those made by the NSIEU.

The sugarmillers were clearly intent on having the 1942 Wage Determination embody occupational categories and qualifying clauses that would depress wage minima as far as possible and hold as many workers as possible close to the absolute minimum. One aspect of this ambition was seen in the attempt that was made to have all workers north of the Tugela river paid less than others; an attempt, that is, to exploit labour according to its regional abundance or scarcity, and level of vulnerability. Umfolozi was satisfied by being the only company permitted to pay lower wages than elsewhere on the grounds (identified by the sugarmill) that they used uneducated labourers with a low standard of living in a region where Indian workers, being malaria intolerant, could not be expected to work. Although the Wage Board entrenched the divisive connotations of the regional location of the sugarmill in this way, no sugarmillers were successful when they attempted also to obtain permission to pay lower wages during the annual off-crop.⁷¹

Off-crop employment was a particularly contentious issue as various categories of skilled as well as unskilled sugarmill employees were affected by the seasonal nature of their work. The most valuable employees in the eyes of their employers, might have been paid during the off-crop to do maintenance work, but others were put on half pay or they went unpaid during that time. Indian sugarmill workers were sometimes given field work to do during the off-crop, and in the case of

⁷¹ House of Assembly, Annexure N^o 60, 1943.

ZSM & P,

The Indians have shown a special aptitude for the work of malaria control, which, moreover, fully and profitably occupies their time during the off-season. Indian employees often become very skilled at laboratory work, but the fact that in the past inter-crop employment of an unskilled nature could only be found for them has obscured and detracted from their value as employees. The important sanitary work of malaria control offers a welcome solution to this problem.⁷²

The differential levels of security engendered by this practice were generally eliminated when the Wage Board ruled against the practice. Nevertheless African workers remained in the persistent situation of insecurity characterising all migrant African wage labour throughout South Africa.

One area which was virtually neglected in the course of the Wage Board's inquiry and subsequent negotiations was the discriminatory sexual division of sugarmill labour. Nothing was done about white women employed as clerks in the sugarmill office, who were consistently lesser paid than their male counterparts, nor about Indian women, who were more severely discriminated against in their capacity as manual workers. Indian women had in some cases around the turn of the century been used as conveyors, carrying bagasse to the boilers.⁷³ They were subsequently employed to do less arduous manual work, most commonly the mending, cleaning and bundling of sacks, for which their wages were now institutionalised as the lowest of all workers with the exception of juvenile males.

The negotiations were followed by an objection stage, without input from the NSIEU, before culminating in the 1942 Wage Determination.⁷⁴ In the

⁷² W.Buchanan, "Inter-Crop Malaria Control by the Laboratory Staff at Empangeni", SASJ 26:6(1942), p.307.

⁷³ Illovo Digest (March, 1973), p.22.

⁷⁴ House of Assembly, Annexure No 16, 1943.

interim, the NSIEU achieved a victory, hard-won in September 1941, which led to the award by Illovo, Tongaat, Hulett's, Crookes Bros., Natal Estates, Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal, and Hulsar, of a minimum 10/- per month wage for adult male labourers and 5/- per month for women and youths.⁷⁵

As far as the analysis of the division of sugarmill labour is concerned, the Wage Board gathered some important, formerly withheld, information from the twenty three sugarmills investigated on the eve of the Wage Determination. This information, shown in Table 4, exposed for the first time the quantitative features of the sugarmills' workforce.

The Wage Determination had very direct consequences for the technical division of sugarmill labour. Mount Edgecombe's chief engineer had no doubt that

the question of labour-saving devices [was] passing through the minds of many factory executive staffs, especially the engineering staff.⁷⁶

As an example he made the prophetic observation that

In many instances in this country, milling tandems have from three to four steam engine-driven mills, and in all instances each engine is operated by an engine driver. By central control all these engines could be operated by one or two drivers.⁷⁷

Labour-saving now stood at the forefront of owners' and managers' thinking about technological change. The internal re-arrangement of the sugarmill emerged as a high priority in this regard. It was not something which could be effected either easily or cheaply, but its potential was vast: in one instance where machinery was re-arranged during the 1940s, the resultant labour-saving was of the order of 90

⁷⁵ *Daily News*, 12.9.1941; *Natal Mercury*, 12.9.1941.

⁷⁶ F. MacBeth, "Labour-Saving Devices", *Proceedings, SASTA* 17(1943), pp. 30-35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

TABLE 4: DIVISION OF SUGARMILL LABOUR BY RACE, GENDER AND AGE: NOVEMBER 1940

	WHITES				AFRICANS				INDIANS				COLOURED				TOTALS	Average Monthly Gross Wage (including rations and quarters)	
	Males		Females		Males		Females		Males		Females		Males		Females			WHITES	OTHERS
	A	J	A	J	A	J	A	J	A	J	A	J	A	J					
Foreman	189	3											1			193	£ 40.11.2	£ 26. 0.0	
Assistant Foreman	8															8	37. 4.7		
Chemist	40															40	37. 8.5		
Assistant Chemist	20	3	2		1											26	25.14.0	12. 0.0	
Bench Chemist				1												1	8. 0.0	8. 0.0	
Artisan	345	56			51				63	4			16	1		536	28. 1.8	7. 3.9	
Executive Staff	17															17	73. 8.10		
Clerical	57	2	16	2												77	29.14.6 12.13.11		
Storeman	5								3							8	26. 0.0	5.18.4	
Compound Manager	4															4	39. 5.0		
Pan Boiler	45	5			1				23				8			82	26. 9.4	10.18.8	
Crane Driver	21															21	23.13.4	4.11.7	
Factory Clerk	1			1	47				44	3						96	11. 0.0	5. 6.11	
Locomotive Driver	60															60	27. 1.6		
Handyman	18				8				21				3			50	22. 7.2	6.10.3	
Printing hand									1							1		4. 8.11	
Motor Driver	1				7				23				1			32	25. 0.0	5. 8.11	
Head Sirdar									4							4		7. 9.11	
Boiler Attendant	17									1			1			18	25. 9.6	12.10.0	
Cube Maker	2															2	22.15.0		
Grade I employee	14				64				336	4						418	24.12.1	4. 7.11	
Grade II employee	1				1445	20	4		1237	95	7					2 809	20. 0.0	3. 7.4	
Labourer: Male A					4863				1384							6 247		3. 4.6	
Male J					146				219							365		2.11.3	
Female						3				48						51		1.19.8	
	956				6 660				3 519				31				11 166		

Source: House of Assembly, Annexure No 16, 1943.

workers.⁷⁸ Other changes were less dramatic in their immediate effect, but jointly they had important consequences for numerous positions in the occupational hierarchy.

Regarding technological change at the extraction stage first, World War II had interfered with endeavours to modernise the mills by interrupting the supply of imported machinery,⁷⁹ but after the War, and especially since the 1950s, many mills were renovated. Mills which had crushed for decades were replaced,⁸⁰ and turbine mill drives made their appearance in the mid-1950s.⁸¹

The problem of keeping the milling tandem supplied with cane, and that of automating the milling operations, were tackled by engineers with growing effectivity particularly since the early 1960s.⁸² Automatic cane carriers had first appeared in the 1950s,⁸³ and at Darnall, for example, where it was considered necessary by engineers to automate the feeding of cane knives, so long as a few instrumental oddments were at hand, the cane knife feeding operator became dispensable. That is,

With the aid of a few relays, second-hand spares from the centrifugal machines and a Hagan boiler control unit, a device was engineered to perform the duty of the cane knife feeding operator.⁸⁴

For these ever resourceful engineers,

⁷⁸ "Labour-Saving Devices (Factory)" (Committee Report), *Proceedings, SASTA* 21(1947), pp.75-79.

⁷⁹ Board of Trade and Industries, Report N^o 298, *The South African Sugar Industry*, 1947.

⁸⁰ At Darnall, for example, the two tandems of 2-roller crushers and 4 mills which had been installed in 1905 were replaced in 1950 by one tandem (J.B.Grant, "The New Darnall Milling Plant", *Proceedings, SASTA* 29(1955), pp.33-37).

⁸¹ G.W.Hedgecock, "Natal's First Turbine Mill Drive", *Proceedings, SASTA* 28(1954), pp.41-45.

⁸² See M.Matic, "Sugar Manufacture in South Africa", *SASJ* 58:5(1974), pp.235-241.

⁸³ J.R.Gunn, "Automatic Cane Carriers", *Proceedings, SASTA* 32(1958), pp.68-71.

⁸⁴ D.J.L.Hulett, "Minimisation of the Human Element in Milling", *Proceedings, SASTA* 34(1960), pp.57-62.

The remaining problem of the feeding of the tandem lay in the diligent loading of the auxiliary cane carrier and this has been solved temporarily by employing a more intelligent type of Indian to supervise the cane yard.⁸⁵

By these changes and the introduction of a "killer plate" to control the flow of cane into the cane knives, it was possible to eliminate 18 workers, or "six units of labour on each shift, namely - two top roll boys, three engine drivers and one cane carrier driver".⁸⁶

Automatic control of mill engines, when first achieved at Umfolozi in the 1961/62 season, implied the reduction in the number of workers at the milling tandem from six to two per shift, a saving that is of twelve workers' wages.⁸⁷ Apparently aware of both the link between automation and unemployment, and the number of years it would take for the financial benefits of labour-saving to be felt, Umfolozi's chief engineer announced the innovation with the following qualification:

No matter how well trained the operators may be, they are only human and their thoughts and actions are not tuned to their tasks every second of every hour of their shift; they have lapses and it is during this period that things usually go wrong. Their job is a monotonous one, eyes fixed on an ammeter or revolution counter or some other instrument and their hand on a wheel which is turned back and forth for eight hours.

It is said that the requirements of good milling is a steady supply of cane into the mill with no interruptions. It is the operator's task to see that these interruptions do not occur, and if this onerous job could be taken out of his hands then a great deal has been achieved.⁸⁸

At the clarification stage, the combination of sulphitation and plate and frame filtration which had been in general use since the mid-1920s underwent change:⁸⁹ from the early 1940s plates and frames were

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ G.G.Ashe, "Automatic Milling Control", *Proceedings, SASTA* 36(1962), pp.65-68.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 50(1976).

eliminated, and then sulphitation too was replaced so that between 1953 and 1967 all the sugarmills had installed in them a new method of defecation by labour-saving rotary filters.⁹⁰ And on the pan floor, by 1950 coil type vacuum pans had been replaced in Natal by calandria pans,⁹¹ although the technique of pan-boiling had not changed as such.

Technological change and the general trend towards automation in the sugarmill created new demands for artisans, while the position of sugar house personnel was modified. On the question of artisanal training in the sugarmills, it is noted that in 1948, the establishment within the ambit of the Department of Labour of the Apprenticeship Committee for the Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Industry formalised existing practices and introduced a measure of statutory control over conditions of apprenticeship. Initially apprenticeships could be served in the following trades: blacksmith; bricklayer and plasterer; carpenter; coppersmith; electrician; fitter and turner; motor mechanic; moulder; sheet metal worker; and welder.⁹² In 1954 boilermaker was added to the list and coppersmith, plumber, and sheetmetal worker deleted.⁹³ Further additions were made in 1960: the trades of diesel fitter; fitter and machiner; instrument mechanic; and turner and machiner.⁹⁴ Thus the trade of fitter and turner, excised from the list in 1960, was fragmented into two substantive areas of specialisation.

Changes in the range of trades for which training and employment could be provided in the sugarmills reflected the direction of technological change on the one hand and, less obviously, the changing status of

⁹⁰ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 52(1978).

⁹¹ C.G.M.Perk, "Coil and Calandria Vacuum Pans", *Proceedings, SASTA* 26(1952), pp.48-53.

⁹² *Government Gazette*, 16.1.1948, 30.9.1949, and 28.4.1950.

⁹³ *Government Gazette*, 15.10.1954, and 31.12.1954.

⁹⁴ *Government Gazette*, 9.9.1960.

certain artisans on the other. Some trades, such as those of the blacksmith, bricklayer, carpenter, moulder, or welder, and particularly those excised in 1954, offered little prospect for promotion beyond the rank of artisan. Artisans in those categories would generally have remained for their entire working lives in their respective departments. By contrast electricians could attain some seniority in the occupational hierarchy by becoming chief electrician. Before World War II the fitter and turner had the even greater prospect of possibly rising to the position of chief engineer. Sugarmill artisans entering the industry after the War were doing so in a climate of diminishing possibilities for promotion above artisanal rank, although they did not share equal occupational status which wage schedules alone might have led one to believe - foremen and supervisory artisans were implicitly drawn from certain, machinery-related trades, usually fitting and turning.

When quantitative aspects of artisanal training in the sugarmills are investigated, a picture of qualitative weakness emerges. The number of operative contracts of apprenticeship in the sugar industry had increased from 57 in 1950 to slightly more or less than 100 in the late 1950s.⁹⁵ Few of these apprentices ever submitted themselves for trade tests, and fewer still passed the tests.

On the question of training for laboratory and sugar house personnel, the difficulties which employers had experienced in the inter-war period led them to review the practice of recruiting whites only as trainees. It was observed by the South African Sugar Technologists' Association (SASTA) president in 1946 that process and laboratory personnel in the sugarmills were unqualified for work in any other industry.⁹⁶ There

⁹⁵ *Annual Reports, Department of Labour.*

⁹⁶ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 20(1946).

appeared, in addition to the seasonal nature of the work and its limited career opportunities, another dimension to what was considered to be the problem of attracting satisfactory candidates for laboratory and sugar house work. By the early 1950s the sugarmillers' demand for trainees, who were implicitly white, had dropped considerably. By the same time some sugarmill laboratories were staffed by Indians. It is not clear exactly to what extent the cheaper Indian workers precipitated the diminished demand for white trainees by the sugar companies, nor for that matter to what extent the supply of white trainees was staunch by the knowledge that Indians were being employed as laboratory staff. It is in any event clear that the presence of Indian workers in the laboratories was at the time regarded to be a reason for a reluctance by whites to undergo training.⁹⁷ Thus racial considerations - the relatively greater exploitability of Indian workers by employers and the avoidance by whites of work done by Indians - affected the demand for and supply of white trainees.

On the grounds that the quality of trainees forthcoming was unsatisfactory, SASTA eventually recommended to SASA that the technologists' course be discontinued. The proposal was accepted by SASA and the course was suspended in 1953.⁹⁸ Past experience led SASTA to advise that consideration be given to re-starting the course only if candidates could be assured of improved conditions of work, salaries, and promotional prospects. When in 1959 the course was re-introduced, it was designed to train milling company employees as factory overseers and to equip them for eventual promotion to the position of chief chemist or process manager, and to enable graduates to take up work

⁹⁷ Discussion of C. van der Pol, "Technical Education in the South African Sugar Industry", *Proceedings, SASTA* 36(1962), pp.15-17.

⁹⁸ "Report of the Technical Education Committee", *Proceedings, SASTA* 33(1959), pp.7-8.

outside the sugar industry if they so desired. This post-1959 training was intended then for milling company employees, with SACGA no longer involved in the issue. Since 1957 the City and Guilds examination was no longer set, and the new course was taught, examined, and certificated by the Sugar Milling Research Institute (SMRI) in conjunction with the NSMA. A junior certificate was made the minimum required standard of schooling for applicants for the 3-year course. The rate of graduation from the course was regulated by having only one group of students taught in a 3-year cycle. Only 8 of the first 23 students graduated and 10 out of the next batch of 12.⁹⁹

By 1959 sugarmillers' interests in the provision of technical training and the elevation of the standards of that training had become causally linked with the process of technological change in their sugarmills. Millers had been formerly virtually inactive when it came to providing theoretical training for their personnel. They had been fortunate to have rich sources of immigrants which they could tap to suit their needs, and training was treated as an organic phenomenon, to be gained, rather than provided, on the job.

The ramifications of labour-saving policies and technical training on the division of sugarmill labour may be seen on the schedules produced in the 1942 Wage Determination and in the agreements reached by the Industrial Council since its registration in 1947. The primary divisions observed in the wage schedules were between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled employees. Another significant division could be inferred between those employees covered by the schedules and those excluded, namely factory managers and chief engineers. These latter

⁹⁹ J.P.N.Bentley, "Interim Report on Technical Education", *Proceedings, SASTA* 37(1963), pp.8-11.

superordinate employees are dealt with in Chapter 6, and here consideration is given only to the employee categories covered by the schedules.

The first points to be made are that between 1942 and 1961 there were few instances of skilled and semi-skilled categories being re-divided, and that the occupational hierarchy was not substantially changed. Neither point is too remarkable given the nature of sugarmilling - a processing rather than an assembly operation - and the limited time-span in question. Figure 11 serves as a point of reference for discussing the more important of the changes that did occur.

The fragmentation of categories reflected on the wage schedules can be conveniently discussed in terms of five groupings. Firstly attention is given to the unskilled categories, Groups I and II and Labourer, which although they were most fragmented, are not specified in the accompanying figure. The number of Grade I jobs was doubled while the Grade II jobs were increased by 20% over the two decades under review. The six Grade I occupations isolated in 1942 - evaporator operator, mill engine driver or roller control operator, and sirdar or induna - were by 1961 added to by the inclusion in this category of first-aid attendant and laboratory attendant, three railway related functions, and two operative jobs. The last two additions were linked to technological change, while the laboratory attendant had risen in status from Grade II. He, the laboratory attendant, now had a Grade II assistant to help him in preparing samples and making and recording certain measurements and readings, with the limitation that the assistant did not do any work which required the use of burettes or pipettes. The relatively few additions to Grade II, such as jobs involving the opening and closing of

FIGURE 11: WAGE DETERMINATIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL FOR SUGAR MANUFACTURING AND REFINING INDUSTRY: RANKING OF SELECTED JOB CATEGORIES IN THE 1942, 1949, 1953 and 1961 DETERMINATIONS

1942	1949/1953	1961
Chemist	Shift engineer Factory overseer Chief storekeeper Chemist Compound manager	Shift engineer Factory overseer Chief storekeeper Chemist Compound manager
Foreman or Shift engineer	Artisan or mechanic Qualified sugar pan boiler Assistant chemist (certificated)	Assistant chemist (certificated) Artisan or Mechanic Qualified sugar pan boiler
Artisan or Mechanic	Qualified assistant overseer Qualified male clerk Assistant chemist (qualified)	Qualified assistant overseer Assistant chemist (qualified) Qualified male clerk
Qualified male clerk Compound manager Qualified sugar pan boiler	Maintenance worker Locomotive driver Boiler attendant Truck repairer	Maintenance worker Locomotive driver Boiler attendant (qualified) Truck repairer
Assistant chemist Assistant foreman/shift engineer Locomotive driver	Qualified female clerk	Boiler attendant (unqualified)
Boiler attendant	Qualified tester	Qualified female clerk
Qualified tester Qualified female clerk	Qualified asst sugar pan boiler Qualified crane driver Handyman Building worker Grade II Weighbridge attendant	Qualified tester
Qualified asst sugar pan boiler Qualified factory clerk Qualified crane driver Head sirdar/induna	Motor vehicle driver Qualified factory clerk Head sirdar/induna	Qualified asst sugar pan boiler Qualified crane driver Handyman Building worker Grade II Weighbridge attendant
Platen hand.	Platen hand	Motor vehicle driver Qualified factory clerk Head sirdar/induna
Motor vehicle driver Handyman Building worker Grade II	Qualified Grade I employee	Platen hand
Qualified Grade I employee	Grade II employee	Qualified Grade I employee
Grade II employee	Adult labourer	Grade II employee
Adult labourer	Female sack mender	Adult labourer
Female sack mender	Juvenile labourer	Female sack mender
Juvenile labourer		Juvenile labourer

SKILLED

SEMI - and UNSKILLED

Source: Government Gazette 25.9.1942; 9.12.1949; 13.11.1953; 22.12.1961.

cocks and valves under supervision, drilling holes, fence erection and repairs, and attending to carbonatation tanks, char kilns or bagasse balers, hardly reflected ongoing fragmentation as such. Perhaps the most significant of additions to Grade II was, in 1947, that of "artisans assistant/handyboy". The category "labourer" was a residual one in all the schedules, and subdivided according to workers' age - above or below 18 years - with the only distinctive designation being that of female menders, cleaners, and bundlers of sacks.

Secondly, the factory clerk designation was changed. In 1942 this person might have been charged by a chemist, storekeeper, or compound manager with such multifarious tasks as checking the arrival and departure times of workers, or interpreting and translating languages; or he might have been a weighbridge attendant. The weighbridge attendant gained recognition in his own right in the 1947 schedule and he also earned a higher wage than the factory clerk. If the following description is anything to go by the justification for his promotion was not difficult to find:

The work may not require a high degree of skill, but it involves a considerable amount of responsibility. Nowadays [in 1940] in addition to weighing and calculating nett weights and keeping weighbridge books, the operator is expected to recognise mixed cane, and to draw attention to consignments marked with the wrong variety, and to observe all cases of spilled cane, and to report any other unusual conditions. With weighbridges near the carrier weighing is nearly continuous, and twelve hours is too long a shift. In many cases the work is left in the hands of inexperienced men not considered good enough for other work, or juniors, or Indians not of the most reliable type...

Some modern scale houses...are dirty, droughty, overcrowded, poorly lit and badly ventilated shacks. Sometimes they have no floors, usually no ceilings, and being made of unlined corrugated iron are either unbearably hot or uncomfortably cold. No man can work well under such conditions.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰G.S.Moberly, "Some Notes on Weighing Practice in Sugar Manufacture", *Proceedings, SASTA* 14(1940), pp.125-134.

Thirdly, there is the division of artisans' tasks to be considered. In 1942 the "building worker, grade II" was already listed, and in 1947 the "handyboy" and the "handyman" were introduced as Grade II and semi-skilled workers respectively, and the maintenance worker as a skilled employee. The "building worker, grade II" was defined as "an employee engaged in erecting houses or accommodation exclusively for occupation by non-Europeans". The handyman's work involved "general repairs and maintenance of site, buildings, plant equipment, and the making of small accessories appertaining thereto". The maintenance worker, although not qualified as such, was nevertheless expected to do work similar to that of an artisan. During the off-crop he could be employed to do artisanal work for 15% less than an artisan's wage. Remembering that qualified artisans commanded one of the highest wages paid to sugarmill employees it is clear that the presence of these various unqualified surrogate artisans effectively lowered the cost of artisanal work, while the status of the white artisan was effectively raised by his having assigned to him an assistant "handyboy" to do the more menial work.¹⁰¹

Fourthly, there is the noticeable increase of suffixes to certain job categories, which was related to the differentiation of trained and untrained personnel in especially the processing side of sugarmilling.

Besides these four most obvious areas of fragmentation, the figure is also indicative of a few changes in the occupational hierarchy. Most noticeable are the relative loss of status of the tester, for unclear

¹⁰¹Some employers were adept at manipulation in order to lower the costs of artisanal work without falling foul of the Industrial Council's regulations: during 1955 it was found that "coloured labour" was being used to repair cane trucks in an open field outside Renishaw sugarmill's workshop; the employers claimed that the work being done was of an agricultural rather than industrial nature (*AEU Monthly Journal and Report* 305 (April, 1955), p.95).

reasons which may have been related to the debated status of laboratory staff in general; and the elevation of the compound manager, whose position is discussed in Chapter 6.

Scientific Management in the Sugarmills: the Post-1962 Period

A senior Natal sugar technologist reflected in 1962 that

Natal had its own crises - the labour crisis, which led to the introduction of Indians, the dearth of technicians and engineers, which led to the introduction of Mauritians and Scotsmen, and mosaic disease, which led to the introduction of Uba cane.¹⁰²

It is surprising that he did not find the problem of domestically training the required personnel critical enough for inclusion in this list. Sugarocrats had time and again been berated in state inquiries into the sugar industry for their lack of attention to training and for their inefficient deployment of personnel.

Now in the early years of the post-sugarocratic period, with export earnings having swelled enormously, nine of the sugarmilling companies made large contributions to the Industrial Fund for Assistance to Private Schools during the early 1960s. The money would be used in 12 schools, mainly to establish and equip laboratories.¹⁰³ This initiative to generate a greater supply of trained scientists in Natal was complemented by the provision of scholarships to cover science or economics courses at the University of Natal. Sugarmillers were now addressing the training issue with unprecedented directness, responding to a critical shortage of technically-skilled personnel which faced the entire South African economy.

¹⁰²Proceedings, SASTA 36(1962), p.9.

¹⁰³"Opening Address", Proceedings, SASTA 36(1962).

New importance was attached to the training of process personnel. Since 1964 the SMRI, now on behalf of and in conjunction with SASMA, paid and trained white candidates for the diploma in sugar technology which would make them eligible for appointment as chief chemists or assistant process managers. The inability to attract sufficient white candidates forced a revision of the scheme so as to offer courses also to Indian students.

Similarly, the training of artisans in the sugarmills was reviewed in the 1970s. With country-wide shortages of skilled labour worsening, the sugar companies turned their attention for the first time to systematic artisanal training. As Table 5 shows, sugarmill apprentices doing trade tests before this revision of training policy had fared well below average. What the data suggest is that an apprentice in a sugarmill could previously have expected training that was nothing short of unsystematic. The transformation brought about through the sugar companies' training schemes showed up the backwardness of the sugarmills as a training ground for artisans during the sugarocratic era.

Initially organised as a training school for white artisans, the Sugar Industry Training Centre at Mount Edgecombe subsequently had its doors opened to Indian and African students. In mid-1979 the Centre had 79 white, 120 Indian, 17 "coloured", and 52 African trainees on its books. Although most were preparing to enter the sugarmills as skilled or semi-skilled artisans, 31 of the 268 students came from companies not engaged in sugar production.¹⁰⁴

Just as they had extended artisanal training to black workers, so were the sugar companies obliged to accommodate African trainees for process

¹⁰⁴SASJ 63:7(1979), p.313.

TABLE 5: SUGARMILL APPRENTICESHIPS, 1960s AND 1970s

	NEW	OPERATIVE	SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES AS PROPORTION OF THOSE DOING TRADE TESTS
1959	30	101	2/16
1960	34	107	4/34
1961	22	104	0/11
1962	19	97	3/29
1963	16	98	1/12
1964	34	104	2/26
1965	45	113	3/27
1966	28	101	17/21
1967	28	113	4/19
1968	32	131	1/27
1969	28	126	3/41
1970	22	110	5/29
1971	36	117	3/36
1972	35	116	7/36
1973	36	125	6/29
1974	30	126	13/31
1975	73	159	13/30
1976	66	188	23/45
1977	52	174	27/48
1978	32	153	56/81
1979	47	122	57/71

Source: Annual Reports, Department of Labour.

work due to the poor response from white and Indian candidates. A scheme was hatched to train African students in sugar technology from 1981, at the newly established Mangosuthu Technikon in Umlazi. A contribution of R150,000 was made by SASMA towards this latter Anglo American sponsored institution, and the African sugar technology students were to be employed and sponsored by individual sugar companies. This extended training scheme encompassed a two-tiered structure of certification, enabling a student to graduate after 3 years with a diploma in sugar technology, or after 2 years with a certificate in sugar technology which was intended to prepare shift supervisors and assistant chemists. A matriculation with passes in mathematics and science was made the entry requirement for the various courses offered under the auspices of the Natal Technikon (whites), the M.L.Sultan Technikon (Indians), and Mangosuthu Technikon (Africans). Between 1964 and 1978, 75 of the 168 white and Indian students enrolled for the courses graduated, only 6 of them stopping at the certificate level.¹⁰⁵ Tables 6 and 7 reflect the outcome of their training.

It has been suggested that one reason for the institution of formal training for artisans and sugar house personnel in the post-sugarocratic period was a general shortage of suitably skilled workers. A related factor was the growing need for operatives to attend to new machinery in the sugarmill. The expansion of management by professionals in the post-sugarocratic period went hand-in-hand with the development of a more scientific approach to the efficiency of processes and personnel in the sugarmill. Within that context the technological advances of this period did not simply create the pre-conditions for training programmes, but were treated as being contingent upon access to satisfactory labour

¹⁰⁵H.F.Wiehe, "Activities of the Training Division of the SMRI - A Seventeen Year Review", *Proceedings, SASTA* 55(1981), pp.59-61.

TABLE 6: GRADUATING SUGAR TECHNOLOGISTS, 1964-1978

	WHITE	INDIAN	TOTALS
1964	10		10
1966	9		9
1968	6		6
1970	3		3
1972	8		8
1973	6	7	13
1974	5	1	6
1975	2	5	7
1978	7	6	13
	56	19	75

Source: H F Wiehe, "Activities of the Training Division of the SMRI - A Seventeen Year Review," *Proceedings, South African Sugar Technologists' Association* 55 (1981), pp 59-61.

TABLE 7: GRADUATES EMPLOYED IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, 1981

Mill Manager	3
Process Manager	9
Assistant Process Manager	25
Shift Supervisor	9
Research	7
	<hr/>
	53

Source: H F Wiehe, "Activities of the Training Division of the SMRI - A Seventeen Year Review," *Proceedings, South African Sugar Technologists' Association* 55 (1981), pp 59-61.

resources.

Technological change in the post-sugarocratic period implied the introduction of automated and electronically controlled machinery into every stage in the sugar-making process. A revolutionary development in the extraction stage of sugar-making was reached by the use of diffusers in place of or in accompaniment with mills, first in 1964 at Dalton, and by 1978 in 9 other sugarmills.¹⁰⁶ This innovation was more decidedly based on technical rather than labour-saving imperatives. It was an innovation which made possible both the automation of the entire process of sucrose extraction, and also the guarantee of steady conditions in that process which would "radically improve the possibility of the pansman producing a better quality sugar".¹⁰⁷ In 1970 fast clarifiers were introduced, and overall the efficiency and speed with which clarified syrup was supplied to the evaporators was greatly increased.¹⁰⁸ Another step towards automation was taken in the late 1970s when continuous vacuum pans were commissioned. Besides being relatively easy to automate, these required less attention, and their performance was less dependent on human skill than in the case of conventional vacuum pans.¹⁰⁹ And the centrifugals employed to separate crystals from the mother liquid remaining after boiling and subsequent cooling were also modified. Until the late 1960s batch centrifugals were used, these being belt- or gear-driven, from a mutual shaft, or water- or electrically-driven. Batch centrifugals were replaced by continuous centrifugals which were not only labour-saving, but they

¹⁰⁶W.R.Buck, "Dalton - South Africa's First Milling Diffusion Sugar Factory", *Proceedings, SASTA* 39(1965), pp.114-121. The introduction of diffusion did not mean that mills were abandoned, but that some mills within a tandem were replaced by a diffuser.

¹⁰⁷"President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 40(1966).

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹W.S.Graham, "A Preliminary Report on a Continuous C Pan", *SASJ* 61:10(1977), pp.507-513.

required considerably less maintenance and consumed less power.¹¹⁰

The technological and managerial changes which were sweeping through the industry had major implications for the structure of the sugarmill's occupational hierarchy. These changes were embodied in the Industrial Council agreements. The effects of the trend towards automated production were to be seen in the the new categories of semi-skilled work appearing on the agreement schedules; and the schedules themselves were structured in new ways in response to an ostensible "deracialisation" of the occupational hierarchy, but more importantly in response to ongoing rationalisation. These developments are approached with reference to Figure 12. The figure contains three sample schedules including that of 1974, reflecting the first major departure from previous schedules; and that of 1981, which was based on the Paterson system of occupational grading.

When the numbered ranking of occupations was introduced in 1974, apparently following the lead set by Hulett's and Tongaat, it was generally regarded as the "job evaluation agreement".¹¹¹ According to the 1974 schedule, Rates 1 to 4 applied to unskilled workers, Rates 5 to to skilled workers. The advent of Paterson grading in 1979 signalled an entrenchment of the system of determining wages according to the bureaucratic principles of job evaluation in terms of levels of responsibility held and types of decisions taken by each stratum of employees. The Paterson criteria are shown in Figure 13. It should be borne in mind that the Industrial Council has had no concern for grades

¹¹⁰See *Proceedings, SASTA* 52(1978), *passim*; C.G.M.Perk, "Centrifugal Machines", *Proceedings, SASTA* 27(1953), pp.34-47; and G.N.Allan, "Developments in South Africa's Sugar Factory Plant Installations 1969-1973", *Proceedings, SASTA* 47(1973), pp.83-99.

¹¹¹*SASJ* 59:11(1976), p.565.

FIGURE 12: WAGE DETERMINATIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL FOR THE SUGAR MANUFACTURING AND REFINING INDUSTRY: RANKING OF SELECTED JOB CATEGORIES IN THE 1968, 1974, and 1981 DETERMINATIONS

1968	1974	1981
Shift Engineer Artisan or Mechanic (on shift) Factory Overseer Chief Storekeeper Chemist Compound Manager	Rate: 16 Chemist Factory Supervisor Supervisory Artisan	Grades: C3 Chemist Supervisory Artisan
Artisan or Mechanic	15 Assistant Chemist	C2 Artisan
Assistant Chemist (certificated) Qualified Sugar Pan Boiler	14 Artisan	C1 Boiler Attendant Locomotive Driver Process Assistant Skilled Clerk
Qualified Assistant Overseer Qualified Assistant Chemist Qualified Male Clerk	Boiler Attendant Locomotive Driver 13 Sugar Pan Boiler	B5 Pan Boiler
Maintenance Worker Locomotive Driver Boiler Attendant (qualified) Truck Repairer	12 Administrative Assistant Maintenance Worker	B4 Tester
Boiler Attendant (unqualified)	11 Laboratory Assistant Process Supervisor	B3 Assistant Pan Boiler Maintenance Worker
Qualified Female Clerk	10 Assistant Pan Boiler (Grade I) Assistant Process Supervisor Boiler House Assistant Tester	B2 Crane Driver
Qualified Tester	9 Assistant Maintenance Worker Assistant Pan Boiler (Grade II) Assistant Tester Clerk Sergeant	B1 Assistant Tester
Qualified Assistant Sugar Pan Boiler Qualified Crane Driver Handyman Building Worker, Grade II Weighbridge Attendant	8 Corporal Overhead Crane Operator (Grade I) Supervisor (Grade I)	A3 Routine Clerk Centrifugal Operator
Motor Vehicle Driver Qualified Factory Clerk Head Sirdar or Induna	7 Chauffeur Leading Laboratory Attendant Mass-Measuring Bridge Operator Mill Tandem Panel Operator	A2 Bag Sewer Watchman
Platen Hand	6 Routine Clerk	A1 Sample Carrier
Grade I Employee	5 Mill Platform Operator (manual control) Security Guard	
Grade II Employee Policeman	4 Centrifugal Operator Messenger	
Labourer	3 Artisan's Hand Bag Sewer	
Female Sack Mender	2 Conveyor Attendant Messenger (Grade II)	
Juvenile Labourer	1 Sweeper	

Source: Government Gazette, 15.11.1968; 2.8.1974; 26.6.1981.

SKILLED

SEMI- and UNSKILLED

D and E. These grades applied to chief engineers and their immediate assistants, to process managers, and to various non-technical managers.

FIGURE 13: PATERSON JOB-EVALUATION CRITERIA

PATERSON GRADE	JOB CATEGORY	EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENT	PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE
A (1-3)	Unskilled	Nil	Nil
B (1-5)	Semi-skilled	Schooling (6 years)	In-service training
C (1-3)	Skilled	Technical Certificate	Apprenticeship
D	Interpretive	Degree/Diploma/"Ticket"	Pupillage
E	Programming	Technical/Business Degree	Management

Source: B Moor, "Technical Manpower Management - Neglected by technologists?," *Proceedings, South African Sugar Technologists' Association* 56 (1982), pp 68-70.

With the adoption of new grading systems during the post-1962 period, the occupational hierarchy was modified and the differentiation between skilled and other employees was greatly revised. When the 1974 agreement was concluded maintenance workers and "administrative assistants", as clerical workers had been re-named, were reduced to semi-skilled status. This left eight occupations in the skilled category (Rates 13 to 16), less than half the number of skilled occupations designated in the agreements of the previous decade. A range of factors accounted for the diminished size of the skilled category. Since 1968 artisans had been elevated in status; and in 1971 assistant chemists, assistant overseers, and boiler attendants were

raised, and clerks relatively down-graded. The trend in progress was further to be seen in the re-designation of certain other occupations. In 1974 the posts of shift engineer, factory overseer, and assistant overseer were replaced by those of factory supervisor and supervisory artisan, while lower down the hierarchy laboratory assistants and process supervisors were introduced and specially catered for at Rate 11. In 1979 the positions of factory supervisor and process supervisor were eliminated, and mid-way between their previous respective positions there appeared the process assistant. The 1979 agreement also ushered out the pan-boiler from the ranks of skilled workers.

Apart from the above changes in the skilled category, the posts of chief storekeeper and compound manager were removed from the schedule in 1974. Within the semi- and un-skilled categories, the surveillance and supervisory employees had their spheres of authority more clearly defined as the titles *induna* and *sirdar* were dropped; clerical work was fragmented; and a hierarchy of policemen incorporated.

What this apparent flux in the post-1962 period represented was, firstly, a revision of process operations, secondly a restructuring of the engineering department, and thirdly, but least obviously, a movement of certain managerial staff beyond the ambit of the agreements. These developments were primarily related to technological change and the consolidation of the process manager's role from the mid-1960s, and to the bureaucratisation of work.

Technological change and the restructuring of the sugarmills' technical division of labour along the above lines acted in combination to raise throughput and output levels quite considerably. Between 1952 and 1977 the number of personnel in all spheres of sugar production per 1000 tons

of cane crushed, fell from 15 to 6.¹¹² In the sugarmills specifically, their combined 1968/69 crushing capacity of 3100 tons per hour was increased to almost 4000 tons per hour in the 1976/77 season, despite the closure of two smaller sugarmills.¹¹³

The gamut of changes dealt with here - and these are only amongst the ones of greatest magnitude - are seen to have implied expanded productivity on the one hand, and the reduction of labour requirements and the transformation of tasks on the other. But as far as the labour process as a whole went, another more profound transformation was in progress, that of continuous production. A combination of continuous and automated production with the disappearance of artisanal process workers opened the way for greater bureaucratic control over sugarmill work. What is more, central participants in that sphere of work were caught up in the movement towards bureaucratic control, although they remained essentially technical personnel. The technical writing of these technologists, whether chemists or engineers, has served to lend clarity in the survey of sometimes complex technological change. Their writing has also been indicative of their conscious pre-occupation with management or company objectives. For them the challenge of automation and general technological modernisation were met enthusiastically as occupational goals. That the elimination of workers from the sugarmill was the objective or the result of their efforts implied that they, the innovators, had positions beyond jeopardy.

Summary

Treated separately, the technical division of labour, technological

¹¹²South African Sugar Year Book (1976-77).

¹¹³Ibid.

change, and technical training have each historically had their respective critical moments: changes in plant and technology are seen at times to have followed structural or technical dictates, causally (if usually not effectively) unrelated to the nature of the workforce; bureaucratisation wrought changes upon the division of labour which might not have been predicated on technological change; and technical training was seemingly always provided under structural rather than internal duress. Treated jointly, these three aspects of the labour process were concurrently brought to a turning point in the mid-1960s, as sugarmill labour was re-divided under novel technical (and managerial) conditions, and a frontal assault was made on the problem of technical training.

That this critical juncture was reached in the twilight years of sugarocratic dominion over the industry serves to confirm the criticisms levelled against sugarmillers, from different quarters and at various times, for their laggardly approach to scientific applications and the development of labour power. That the juncture was reached at all speaks of structural exigencies as well as the rise of professional corporate management and the harnessing of initially relatively autonomous research practices in the industry. The wider implications of these developments, and the question of the relationship between the occupational hierarchy and the racial division of labour, are discussed in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RACIAL DIVISION OF SUGARMILL LABOUR

The whole question of racism is central to the global history of sugarmilling. Historically, the classification and oppression of people in terms of the amount of pigment in their skins has been practised in the aftermath of conquest and enslavement, and it has been an integral aspect of struggles amongst labouring people over different levels of exploitation or debasement in those situations. The ideology and practice of racism have been inter-related with certain characteristics of the international division of sugarmill labour: African slaves were transported to the sugar plantations of the Mascarenes, the Caribbean islands, and the New World in general; skilled "creoles" from Demerara and Mauritius found their way to sugarmills on Africa's east coast, whence had come their ancestors; plantation ownership and management have commonly been in the hands of "whites". Thus have regional and cultural idiosyncracies been blended with racist ideology to reinforce the persistence of the distinctive occupational structure of sugarmilling.

In the case of Natal the fundamental division that arose was that which saw white sugarmill employees placed in the posts of manager, engineer, chemist, artisan and clerk, and black employees in menial labour. Another fundamental schism separated Indian workers, who had initially come to Natal between 1860 and 1911 under an indenture system, and African workers. The need for owners to turn to immigrant indenture systems in a recently conquered and relatively populous colony reflected the capacity for Africans in Natal to adapt to their conquest without having to succumb immediately to the mode of production introduced by

the colonists.

The objective of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the part played by the Natal sugarocracy in the establishment of a racial division of sugarmill labour. An introductory passage on the question of cheap sugarmill labour sets the scene. Then, after first examining the division of black workers during three pre-World War II periods, the position of white sugarmill workers before the War is dealt with chronologically in two sections. Thereafter an analysis is made of internal structural influences on the reproduction of the racial division of sugarmill labour which do not lend themselves to strict periodisation; principally those associated with occupational mobility and inheritance over a number of generations.

Cheap Sugarmill Labour

Since the eighteenth century, global sugar production has been carried on with a particular labour configuration. While unskilled manual labour was intensively used in the fields, the sugarmill itself became increasingly reliant upon skilled labour as sugar technology grew. Regardless of the extent of technological dualism between field and sugarmill, work in both spheres always implied, primarily because of its seasonality, some modicum of rationality in its organisation. Overriding all other influences on the configuration of labour was the question of the specific classes from which labour came into sugar production. Some connotations of the several varieties of labour which have historically been put to work by sugarmillers deserve brief consideration in order that a context be provided for the discussion of the division of sugarmill labour in Natal.

Broadly speaking, labour in sugar has taken five forms: namely, slaves; "apprentices", **engage** or **enganche** labourers, and indentured workers; **colonos**; migratory workers; and proletarian workers.¹ Each form presented owners with particular possibilities and constraints. Slavery, it has already been argued, was a system which dictated very precise parameters within which production could take place. Quantitatively, a plantation owner could raise the brute labour power at his disposal by buying additional slaves, but the seasonality of crop production and the class position of slaves hampered a qualitative improvement in productivity.² While the transition from slave labour to wage labour may have been accompanied by increased productivity, it is significant that in the case of Pernambuco, slaves were frequently in the nineteenth century better off than the free workers who replaced them, and owners, who although they did not achieve much by way of expanded production, were able to benefit from abolition by effecting a rationalisation of their labour costs.³

Elsewhere, abolition was met with different responses from owners, many of whom successfully introduced slightly diluted variants of the slave

1 For additional detail see S.L.Engerman, "Contract Labor, Sugar, and Technology in the Nineteenth Century", **Journal of Economic History** 43(1983), pp.635-659.

2 An article of related interest is J.R.Ward, "The Profitability of Sugar Planting in the British West Indies, 1650-1834", **Economic History Review** 31:2(1978), pp.197-213.

3 See P.L.Eisenberg, "Abolishing Slavery: The Process on Pernambuco's Sugar Plantations", **Hispanic American Historical Review** 52(1972), pp.580-597; and J.Reis, "From **banguê** to **usina**: Social Aspects of Growth and Modernization in the Sugar Industry of Pernambuco, Brazil, 1850-1920". In **Land and Labour in Latin America: Essays on the Development of Agrarian Capitalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**, edited by K.Duncan and I.Rutledge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Another article of related interest is J.H.Galloway, "The Last Years of Slavery on the Sugar Plantations of Northeastern Brazil", **Hispanic American Historical Review** 51(1971), pp.586-605. See also R.Linhart, **Le Sucre et la Faim**. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980, p.42.

system. The "apprentices" of Jamaica and Mauritius,⁴ the **enganche** sugar workers of Peru,⁵ the Moçambican **engages** in Réunion,⁶ and the indentured Asian workers throughout the British empire,⁷ were all contractually bound to their employers under conditions closely resemblant of slavery: whatever their euphemistic title, these workers were subjected to extra-economic coercion and deprivation.⁸

In yet other sugar producing regions such as Moçambique and Argentina, **colonos** offered owners an alternative to the post-slavery indentured diaspora.⁹ These **colonos** were workers from whom labour was extracted by the owners who had dispossessed them of their land. Like the forementioned labour systems, this quasi-feudal system implied considerable extra-economic coercion, but it differed from the others in that it relieved owners of the legal obligation to employ **colonos** throughout the year. By contrast to other legally unfree wage-workers, **colonos** retained possession - however tenuous and inconsequential it may

4 See G.E.Cumper, "Labour Demand and Supply in the Jamaican Sugar Industry, 1830-1950", **Social and Economic Studies** 2:4(1954), pp.37-86; and M.D.North Coombes, "Labour Problems in the Sugar Industry of Ile de France or Mauritius 1790-1842". Master's dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1978.

5 See P.F.Klarén, "The Social and Economic Consequences of Modernization in the Peruvian Sugar Industry, 1870-1930". In **Land and Labour in Latin America**, edited by Duncan and Rutledge.

6 Mentioned in D.Lincoln, "Capital and the Milling of Sugar in Moçambique before 1942", **Perspectives in Economic History** 1(1982), pp.30-42.

7 See H.Tinker, **A New System of Slavery**. London: Oxford University Press, 1974; and K.Saunders, editor **Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920**. London: Croom Helm, 1984.

8 See *inter alia* R.Burbach and P.Flynn, **Agribusiness in the Americas**. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980; W.Kloosterboer, **Involuntary Labour since the Abolition of Slavery**. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1960; and M.Lemoine, editor **Sucre amer: Esclaves aujourd'hui dans les Caraïbes**. Paris: Encre, 1981.

9 See I.Rutledge, "The Integration of the Highland Peasantry into the Sugar Cane Economy of Northern Argentina, 1930-43". In **Land and Labour in Latin America**, edited by Duncan and Rutledge; and L.Vail and L.White, **Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique**. London: Heinemann, 1981.

in fact have been - of their means of production, and in this they bore a resemblance to migrant peasant or subsistence producers who worked seasonally for wages. In the case of nineteenth century Peru, migrant sugar workers were **enganche** workers; that is, their service was obtained by coercion rather than economic incentive.¹⁰

In each of these above systems then, cost minimisation was an important employer consideration, albeit at the expense of coercive control and thus less than optimum productivity. Were it not for the presence of proletarian workers alongside bonded workers of one type or another, limited technology might have been the characteristic feature of nineteenth and early twentieth century sugarmills. For reasons discussed in Chapter 4, the technical modifications made in those sugarmills required a proletarian presence - workers whose conditions of employment were negotiable. Just how negotiable those conditions were varied according to many structural and other factors, such as the degree of accommodation and resistance offered by the respective workers; certainly growing proletarianisation in the wake of the abolition of most of the above labour systems undermined the possibilities for continued unilateral wage determination by owners.

Because sugarmillers had generally resorted to various labour systems, sometimes sequentially and sometimes concurrently, they had drawn together in their sugarmills and estates workers of diverse regional origins, and accordingly placed them in different occupational categories. Out of this process there evolved a racist ideology which sugarmillers mobilised in the interests of dividing, controlling and cheapening their labour. This racist ideology has taken its toll

¹⁰ Klarén, "Modernization in the Peruvian Sugar Industry".

throughout the sugar-producing regions of the world, not least of all in Natal.

Black Sugarmill Workers in Natal; the Pre-Sugarocratic Period: 1850-1905

It was advocated by Cocqui in 1857 that in Natal "As a principle, Kafirs should be used in agriculture, and Coolie labour, if used at all, in the manufactory".¹¹ Such was the rhetoric of many of the commentator's sugarmilling contemporaries in the colony, although by no means many were so circumspect about the use of Indian workers. By 1872, Robinson's narrative informs us,¹² most sugarmillers had "mixed" labour forces; that is to say, they used both African and Indian labourers. The largest estate in Natal at the time had as many as 500 labourers, but few others had as many as 300, and most had in the vicinity of 150 or fewer. The mixture of labour in this fashion arose out of a compromise which had been reached by colonial planters over the issues leading up to and surrounding the Indian indenture system. As some of the Natal planters testified before Robinson, certain preferences mediated by pragmatism and necessity were responsible for heterogeneity: Osborn of Umtata Estate "prefers Natal kafirs to Basutos and coolies; especially as the latter, since they became free of assignment, are much more insolent than they used to be...Basutos, though strong and muscular, are lazy and less trust-worthy than our natives";¹³ Shire "prefers Natal kafirs as workmen, but thinks a mixture is preferable";¹⁴ Saunders "employs both coolies and kafirs and is partial to the former".¹⁵

¹¹ A.Cocqui, **Practical Remarks on the Colony of Natal**. London: Effingham Wilson, 1857, p.47.

¹² J.Robinson, **Notes on Natal: An Old Colonist's Book for New Settlers**. Durban: Robinson & Vause, 1872.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.27.

Robinson's information would tend to confirm L.P.Thompson's statements on the overwhelming preponderance of Indian over African workers on nineteenth century Natal's sugar estates.¹⁶ Although Thompson could find no figures showing the precise ratio, he did find cause to be assertive about the preference which planters had for the African workers who were so outnumbered on the estates by Indian workers. The reasons offered as substantiation for his claim are of some salience: he could show that in 1872 African workers cost less than indentured or free Indian workers; African workers had stronger physiques than Indian workers; Africans were regarded as being more honest than Indians; and the indenture system placed a financial burden on the Colonial Treasury.¹⁷

The prevailing Indian:African ratio in the colonial sugar industry's workforce has to be viewed against the background of endeavours on the part of Natal's sugarmillers, and other employers, to secure for themselves a permanently adequate supply of unskilled labour. As Harries has demonstrated quite convincingly,¹⁸ the question of labour supply in colonial Natal outweighed labour cost considerations as a first concern of the emergent sugarocracy. The importance of successful Reserve crop production for the Colonial Treasury restrained the Colonial Government from applying pressure ubiquitously to dislodge Africans from their lands in Natal; instead, labour importation schemes were devised by the Government in an effort to satisfy the demands of colonial employers. Harries has made a detailed study of the tens of thousands of Tonga workers who were as a consequence recruited between

¹⁶ L.P.Thompson, "Indian Immigration into Natal 1860-1872", *Archives Year Book for South African History* 2(1952).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹⁸ P.Harries, "Labour Migration from Mozambique to South Africa; with Special Reference to the Delagoa Bay Hinterland, c. 1862 to 1897". PhD thesis, University of London, 1983.

the mid-1850s and the early 1880s for work in Natal. Initially the Tonga immigration schemes were disparate responses to employer appeals, but in 1874 the importation of Tonga workers from southern Moçambique was placed on a more permanent footing. From that time some immigrants came overland under Dunn's agency. These were the highest paid of the Tongas in Natal, and the capitation losses incurred by employers as a result of desertion led in 1876 to the pass laws being extended to these workers, who then also faced a sentence of a three-year indenture for breaking their six-month contracts. Moçambique also supplied workers by sea, mostly on a voluntary basis to serve 2- or 3-year contracts at 15/- a month, but including a relatively small number of "liberated" slaves.¹⁹ Although the end of the Anglo-Zulu War heralded an influx of Zulus into Natal, Tongas continued coming from Moçambique until 1884. The termination of the Tonga labour immigration schemes in 1884 was seen to be primarily attributable to the high capitation losses suffered by deserted employers, as well as to fears that smallpox would be spread by the immigrants from Moçambique. Undoubtedly the possibility that existed for Zulu workers to be employed at sometimes half the wages paid to Tonga workers, and the Indian indenture system, also had a considerable influence.

The availability of local African labour had begun to show signs of increasing towards the end of the 1800s. Agricultural output in the Natal Reserves was steadily dropping and "the corollary of declining productivity and poverty was a rise in the number of migrant labourers".²⁰ Across the Tugela, in Zululand, the Zulu Civil War between 1879 and 1884 had been the prelude to a greater efflux of

¹⁹ *NLC, Sessional Papers*, 4, 1874.

²⁰ D. Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845-1910*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1971, p.193.

migrant labour. As Guy has so cogently argued,

there was a fundamental difference between the life of the Zulu before 1879 [when the territory was invaded by British forces] and their way of life after 1884. In the former period they were in possession of their land and largely in control of their labour and its products: after 1884 they were losing this possession and control. These changes were initiated by external invasion and perpetuated by civil war.²¹

Neither the developments in Natal nor those in Zululand provided an adequate basis for sugarmillers to retract their commitment to the Indian indenture system. Whether or not the growth of migrancy could have satisfied the sugarmillers' labour requirements is difficult to ascertain; but as long as part of their workforce was constituted of indentured workers who had to be paid throughout the year, it was unlikely that year-round employment would be given to migrants if this could be avoided. Moreover, the sugarmillers' cost of continuing with indentured labour must have been a factor which influenced the maximum wages paid to migrants (and thus the relative unattractiveness of the sugar industry for workers who had the alternative of going to the gold mines).

What were the wage ceilings that colonial sugarmillers had been so determined to maintain, and how did they give shape to the composition of the sugarmill's manual workforce? These wage ceilings were, in a word, low. Once the Indian indenture system was put into operation, wage levels were established which neither creoles from Réunion nor Chinese workers were prepared to accept.²² As far as the total costs incurred by employers were concerned, the Indian indenture system was less attractive than the various schemes under which African workers

²¹ J.Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982, pp.243-244.

²² F.N.Ginwala, "Class, Consciousness and Control - Indian South Africans 1860-1946". PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1974, p.76.

were indentured, even if Indians' wages were the lowest of all. However circumstances necessitated their commitment to the Indian indenture system: although it may not have been a completely reliable recruitment operation it did guarantee a minimum of five years of work from its subjects, who were paid at an inflexible rate, and who were relatively easily policed. Having made that commitment, it would only be under the greatest of pressure that sugarmillers would be induced into paying unindentured workers any more than legislation held them to with respect to indentured workers.

As Ginwala has reminded us,²³ the wages paid to indentured Indian workers remained unchanged for 51 years - for men it was 10/- per month with an annual increment of 1/- during the five year period of indenture, and for women it was a variable, but always lesser amount paid at a daily rate. By contrast to the stability of those wages, the wages paid to free Indians were, within a few years of the expiry of the first indentures, increasing. Employers had been forced to pay higher wages to these free workers as a consequence of, on the one hand, skill acquisition by Indians and, on the other hand, the wide scope that existed for work outside the sugar industry for free Indians; these were imperatives so long as the labour power of skilled white workers was expensive and the indenture schemes could not deliver to the sugarmillers as many cheap workers as they desired on a recurring basis.

In Table 8 it is shown that by 1872 Indian workers were being subjected to wage and occupational differentiation as sugarmillers chartered their wage minimisation course through the complex of alternatives open to them. When Campbell listed the wages paid to black workers in the Natal sugar industry over the 20 year period 1866 to 1885 (see Table 9), the

²³ *Ibid.*, p.90.

TABLE 8: FREE INDIAN SUGAR WORKERS' WAGES IN NATAL DURING THE 1870s

	1872					1873	1876
	MEREBANK	REUNION	WATERLOO	REDCLIFFE	MEADOW BANK		
MEN							
Field labour	13/-					16-18/-	} 18-25/-
Mill labour	14/-	14/-	18/-	16/-	16/-	20-30/-	
Sirdar	22/-					40-80/-	} 60-100/-
Blacksmith		50/-	} 30/-	} 30-40/- double rations	} 25-30/-	40-60/-	
Pan Boiler		80/-					
Carpenter	40/-					50-60/-	
WOMEN	5/-	6d daily no ration		6d daily			

Sources: For 1872, Colony of Natal, *Report of the Coolie Commission*, Pietermaritzburg: Government Printer, 1872;
for 1873, F N Ginwala, "Class, Consciousness and Control - Indian South Africans 1860-1946." PhD thesis,
Oxford University, 1974, p 91;
for 1876, NLC, *Sessional Papers*, 6, 1876.

only commentary he offered regarding the fluctuation of those wages was that war inflation and railway construction had buoyed wages between 1877 and 1880.²⁴ What he might also have remarked on was that after 1874 these wages were for the first time higher than those paid to indentured workers - until that juncture unindentured workers could be had at lower rates than those stipulated for indentured labour, which would seem to suggest that the indenture system had until then been close to fulfilling its purpose. After 1874, and especially between 1877 and 1883, the sugarmillers were forced into paying substantially higher wages to supplement their indentured workforces. Upon closer analysis it is seen quite clearly that while they were the most impressive, war-time inflation and railway construction were not the only causes for the departure from earlier trends in wage rates.

TABLE 9: AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGES FOR AFRICAN WORKERS IN NATAL, 1866-1885

1866	10/-	1876	18/-
1867	9/-	1877	25/-
1868	9/-	1878	25/-
1869	8/-	1879	25/-
1870	9/-	1880	22/-
1871	10/-	1881	20/-
1872	11/-	1882	20/-
1873	13/-	1883	20/-
1874	15/-	1884	18/-
1875	18/-	1885	10/-

(Including 3lbs mealie meal per day)

Source: W Y Campbell, *The Natal Sugar Industry*. Durban: P Davis & Sons, 1885, Appendix IV.

²⁴ W.Y.Campbell, *The Natal Sugar Industry*. Durban: P.Davis & Sons, 1885, Appendix IV.

Data from the relevant colonial records show that the high plateau reached by blacks' wages in general between 1878 and 1884 was neither exclusively a correlate of competition for labour, nor was the plateau devoid of undulation. Average monthly wages paid to Africans are plotted in Figure 14 to show how they fluctuated in the four main contemporary sugar-producing areas of Natal, namely Umlazi district in the colonial county of Durban, Victoria county's two districts of Inanda and Lower Tugela, and Alexander county. It is seen that between 1877 and 1883 wages in Lower Tugela district, bordering on Zululand, were the least responsive to the pressure which had caused wages to rise in the other three districts; and that the steepest dips and peaks were experienced in the Inanda district. Explanations for these tendencies, as well as the overall plateau effect on African's wages, may be found in the annual returns of the respective resident magistrates. The impression gained from those returns has two dimensions: there is seen on the one side how employers became more reliant on Indian workers as many Tonga workers dispersed and other Africans were drawn into war-time service or railway work;²⁵ in Alexander and Inanda some employers had to contend with "unwilling" African workers recruited through chiefs, while others had become dependent on labour contractors;²⁶ there were shortfalls in the supply of Indians indentured for;²⁷ and in 1882 Zululand was still in an "unsettled state".²⁸ The other dimension of the picture painted by resident magistrates was of the growing number of alternatives to wage labour by means of which Africans could earn money: the sale of cattle during the early stages of the war,²⁹ the substitution of iron ploughs for traditional implements,³⁰ and transport

²⁵ Blue Book, 1878 and 1880; and Natal Mercury 4.2.1879.

²⁶ Blue Book, 1881.

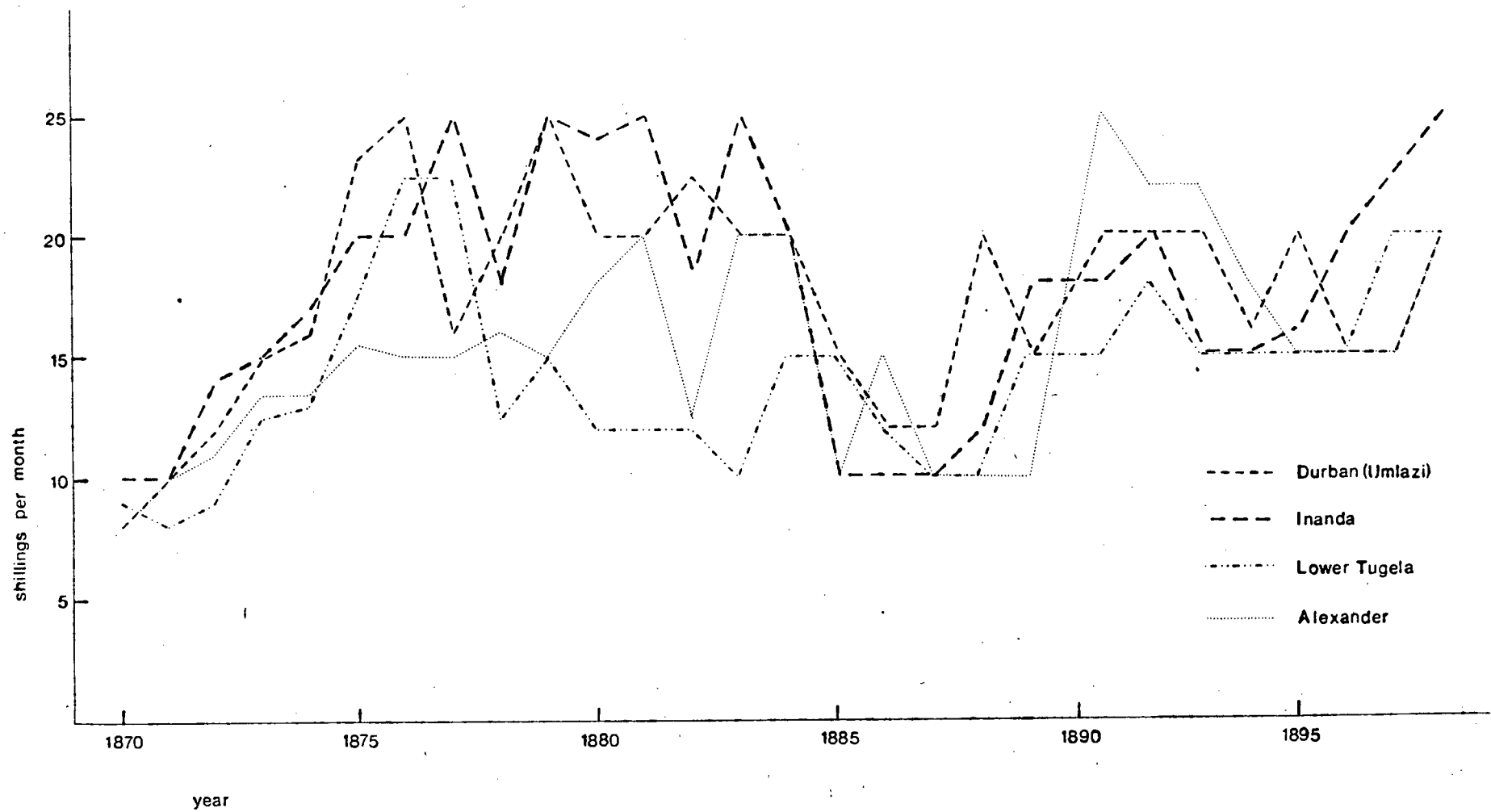
²⁷ Blue Book, 1882.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Blue Book, 1879.

³⁰ Blue Book, 1880.

FIGURE 14: AFRICAN WORKERS' WAGES IN COLONIAL NATAL



riding,³¹ were some of these. Incidentally although these developments were cause for disquiet amongst labour-hungry employers, they had something positive to offer sugarmillers too. Transport costs dropped,³² and mealies could be bought cheaply as rations.³³ It was obviously a fragile independence that these Africans had won for themselves; as fragile as that achieved by some free Indians in Inanda district who had no option but to re-indenture themselves when their mealie crops failed in 1883.³⁴

By 1884 the supply of indentured Indians had been restored to earlier levels and meetings were held by employers intent on lowering other workers' wages.³⁵ Those wages plummeted after 1884, only to rise again immediately after the opening of the Transvaal goldfields. From this time onwards the upward tendency of blacks' wages was sustained by the demand for mine labour.

Such was the situation in colonial Natal then: owners generally although not unanimously expressed preference for African workers, yet out of necessity they used Indian workers. Part of the necessity was born of the limited availability of labour from any particular source and the uncertainty of its supply; part born of the variation in costs of labour from its respective sources; and yet another part born of the perceived advantages of exploiting the supposedly "racial" differences in docility, strength, loyalty and intelligence. These imperatives were reflected also in the growing preponderance of Indian workers inside the sugarmills, a trend which was already noticeable when the Coolie

³¹ Blue Book, 1881.

³² Blue Book, 1883.

³³ Blue Book, 1881.

³⁴ Blue Book, 1884.

³⁵ Ibid.

Commission reported in 1872.³⁶

As Table 10 shows, towards the end of the nineteenth century, in 1895, sugarmillers were still prominently featured amongst the largest employers of Indians in Natal. At the end of the century the vast majority of all personnel employed by Natal sugarmillers were Indians.³⁷ This continued preponderance of Indians amongst sugarmill workers was however already beginning to diminish before the end of the colonial period,³⁸ as proportionately more African workers entered the industry.

TABLE 10: THE 25 LARGEST EMPLOYERS OF INDIANS IN NATAL, 1895

	Employer	Number of Men Employed
1	Natal Government Railways	1 200
2	Natal Central Sugar Co	1 014
3	Reynolds Bros	752
4	G S Smith	566
5	Reunion Estate	320
6	E Saunders	257
7	A Michel	204
8	F Addison	192
9	J L Hulett	181
10	C B de Gersigny	162
11	Prospect Hall Estate	129
12	Effingham Estate	126
13	(late) J R Saunders	116
14	Bazley and Sons	113
15	Seacow Lake Estate	107
16	A Wilkinson	105
17	H P Harrison	99
18	W R Hindson and Co	93
19	J A Polkinghorne	90
20	E W Hawksworth	72
21	Barrow Green Estate	71
22	Nicholson and Godfrey	67
23	M P L A Cheron	65
24	W Pearce	59
25	African Boating Co	57

Source: NLA, *Sessional Papers*, 4, 1895.

Throughout the pre-sugarocratic period sugarmillers had shown themselves to be capable of seizing every opportunity to facilitate labour recruitment and to minimise their own expenses. Not least of these

³⁶ Report of the Coolie Commission, Pietermaritzburg, Government Printer, 1872.

³⁷ Statistical Year Book for 1900.

³⁸ The Statistical Year Book for 1903, the last in which the division of sugarmill labour was clearly quantified showed the proportion of Indian workers to have been almost 90%. See Chapter 8 Note 28 for detailed summary of statistics.

opportunities was that which came with political office, and their work as political agents had mirrored their changing fortunes as employers.³⁹ Political campaigning, the evolving pattern of labour recruitment, and wage manipulation were inseparable concerns of the infant sugarocracy; a unity of interests which could be advanced by reference to racist ideology. As Ginwala phrased it,

the chief beneficiary of much of the nineteenth century anti-Indian legislation in Natal was not the small white colonial farmer, the shopkeeper or artisans, but the larger employer, who for sixty years had manipulated the ideology of racism to ensure for himself a supply of cheap exploitable labour.⁴⁰

Viewed from another perspective,

Imperial policy in regard to the native population was apparently greatly influenced by negrophilism and the missionary outlook...This paternal attitude met with scant favour from the European settlers, who appear to have held the view that the indigenous labour was, in effect, an asset which they had an inherent right to utilise, and to this end they freely advocated a "forced labour" system for the Native.⁴¹

Although he had not in the earlier part of the period been a sugarmiller, J.L.Hulett made speeches around the turn of the twentieth century that carried the message which his sugarmilling associates were themselves intent on putting before the Legislative Assembly. He had on the one hand to acknowledge "the undesirability of flooding the Colony with Indians",⁴² while on the other hand he supported "the wish of the Government to increase the labour supply of the Colony. The question is how to do it effectually".⁴³ Hulett regarded whites to be naturally unable to perform manual work in the fields, and he sought to increase

³⁹ The Indian Immigration Trust Board was by the end of the nineteenth century made up almost entirely of sugarmillers, and in 1910 the Colonial Secretary could find cause to remark that "the Indian Immigration Board resemble Directors of a Company" (NLA Debates, Vol.49, 417-424, 12.1.1910).

⁴⁰ Ginwala, "Indian South Africans", pp.64-65.

⁴¹ Board of Trade and Industries, Report N^o 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry**, 1926.

⁴² NLA Debates, Vol.25, 108-124, 1.4.1897.

⁴³ NLA Debates, Vol.27, 560, 1898.

Natal's labour supply by renewing pressure on Africans.

The Twilight Years of Indentured Labour in Natal: 1905-1914

Until such time as African labour power could be harnessed, Hulett was prepared to allow the Indian indenture system to function: in 1907 he declared

This is not a white man's country. It never was. It never will be...

If there were plenty of reliable Native labour then we would not want Indians. I never wanted an Indian. In my operations I endeavoured to do without them as long as I possibly could;⁴⁴

and in 1908 he expressed his opinion that wages paid to Africans on the Kimberley diamond fields undermined the cause of Natal planters, as did the "feudal system" of tenant farming in Natal, and therefore to put an immediate end to the indenture system would lead to the "annihilation" of plantation agriculture.⁴⁵ He offered an interim solution to the dilemma in 1910, when he proposed that "one of the objects that we have in view at the present time is to get as many Indians in the Colony as possible to re-indenture".⁴⁶

Hulett's proposal had been evoked during the second-reading debate to amend the Act in terms of which free Indians were required to pay an annual "licence" fee of £3. The Bill now before the Legislative Assembly was intended to relieve women of this form of taxation, and sugarmillers gave it support in the hope of encouraging more Indians to re-indenture themselves. As matters stood, two free Indian parents with one dependant child over the age of 13 years were liable for an annual payment of £10 to the colonial state - £1 as poll tax and £3 each for

⁴⁴ NLA Debates, Vol.42, 15.7.1907.

⁴⁵ NLA Debates, Vol.44, 326-354, 14.7.1908.

⁴⁶ NLA Debates, Vol.49, 402-407, 12.1.1910.

their "licences" - when, as E.Saunders pointed out, "the utmost wages a labourer can obtain is from £12 to £15 per year".⁴⁷ What somebody like Saunders found particularly disturbing was that indebted Indians, and this included those whose "licences" were in arrears, were precluded from re-indenture.

During the debate G.S.Armstrong put forward his own views on the matter thus:

I employ Indians, although not to the extent that my colleague, Mr Saunders does; still I think that the object we all have as Colonists is not to allow these people to live permanently with us, and if we could get their indentures terminated in India, it would be to the interest of the Colony.⁴⁸

For Armstrong the solution to the labour question facing sugarmillers was clear. As he had articulated it in 1908,

To educate a Native or an Indian, without teaching him to work, is to give him a weapon which he will use against us...
...our Natives have never been in want. And to-day what is at fault is the laziness. They are an indolent people, and they want to be trained; and the only way to train them is to train them when they are young, and give them a continuous service for three or four years...the Indians work so well in this Colony simply because they are indentured for a term.⁴⁹

Armstrong had repeated this proposal in the Legislative Assembly,⁵⁰ and although it did not receive widespread support, it was an idea that was pressed again by Friend Addison in his personal deposition in the 1909 **Report of the Indian Immigration Commission**. Addison had outlined there the benefits of a **konza** system for fourteen year old Africans. He believed in short that

If the indentured youths are properly treated, housed, fed, and taught, they would and could not live as their

⁴⁷ **NLA Debates**, Vol.49, 341-342, 10.1.1910.

⁴⁸ **NLA Debates**, Vol.49, 521-528, 19.1.1910.

⁴⁹ **NLA Debates**, Vol.44, 145-167, 25.6.1908.

⁵⁰ **NLA Debates**, Vol.44, 481-494, 22.7.1908, and 520-526, 23.7.1908.

forefathers did, and would be dissatisfied with the comforts of kraal life.⁵¹

Colonial sugarmillers had quickly come to the realisation that the Indian indenture system could not fulfil their every need as employers, and they were perpetually searching for a means of keeping up the supply of cheap labour. Suggestions for a **konza** system were never put into practice, and the indenture system itself was lost to sugarmillers in 1911, and so inevitably the restructuring of the sugarmill's workforce gained momentum in the post-colonial period. That African labour would be progressively substituted for Indian labour in the post-colonial sugarmills was in many respects a belated response to the measures which sugarmillers had so heartily supported during the nineteenth century to drive Africans into wage labour; it also reflected the resistance put up by free Indians to the conditions under which they were expected to work in the sugarmills. However, the sugarocracy still found their search for African labour to be problematic,⁵² and it had been with some desperation that they had discussed means of getting Indian workers to re-indenture themselves.

By the end of the indentures period wide variations had emerged in the wages paid to the three categories of black workers: free Indian workers, the nucleus of a stable resident black workforce, were paid approximately 35/- a month; African workers' wages fluctuated with the tide of labour supply at around 30/- a month; and indentured and re-indentured workers' wages (frequently only paid every two months) were kept at the minimum permissible levels of 10/- to 14/- for the former and 28/6 for the latter.⁵³

⁵¹ **Report of the Indian Immigration Commission**, Pietermaritzburg, Government Printer, 1909, Appendix 1.

⁵² See S.T.van der Horst, **Native Labour in South Africa**. London: Oxford University Press, 1942, p.197.

⁵³ TAD, K39, Vol.5, Indian Wages, 1922.

When the end of the Indian indenture system appeared on the horizon, sugarmillers lost little time in beginning to search for an alternative reliable source of labour. In their quest it was never clearly demonstrated that the labour they sought was to be used in the sugarmills. Most relevant documentation referred to agricultural labour, yet the sugarmills did experience shortages, and sugarmillers stood out more prominently than growers in the related negotiations with government officials.

In December 1913 representatives of the Natal Sugar Association (NSA) met in Durban with the Director of Native Labour, Pritchard, to discuss measures that might be taken to offset the loss of the Indian indenture system as a source of labour.⁵⁴ The Labour Committee of the NSA had passed a number of resolutions which they had then given to Pritchard in the form of proposals. He could offer them little immediate consolation regarding the appeal to have labour touting abolished in a 50-mile wide belt along the Natal and Zululand coast, which would protect local employers against competition with mine-owners; and regarding the request for the government's assistance in procuring labour from north of 22° latitude he could only suggest that the NSA approach the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association in an attempt to have the latter organisation recruit workers in Moçambique on their behalf.⁵⁵ Little more than sympathetic assurances were immediately forthcoming when a few months later sugarmillers and other Natal employers comprising the Natal Labour Association waited on the Prime Minister in Cape Town. The most optimistic note in Botha's response was his promise to facilitate recruiting in the Rhodesias and Moçambique if this entailed no changes

⁵⁴ TAD, GNLB 81, Notes of Meeting between Director of Native Labour and Sugar Planters, 15.12.1913.

⁵⁵ TAD, GNLB 81, Resolutions Passed by Natal Sugar Association Labour Committee, 1913.

in the existing legislation.⁵⁶

Black Sugarmill Workers in the Aftermath of
the Indenture System: 1914 - late 1930s

The idea of systematically recruiting "tropical labour" did not materialise, and although sugarmillers had earlier been given a fillip by the government's definition of certain labour districts in Natal within which they could recruit under licence without having to compete against Transvaal employers, they were nevertheless not relieved of their problem of procuring labour.⁵⁷ Besides the problem of having to compete as a weaker party in this respect, sugarmillers also found the Pass Laws wanting when it came to rounding up deserters. They saw the solution to these problems as hinging on the reconciliation of the terms of the colonial Masters' and Servants' laws and the 1911 Native Regulation Act.⁵⁸ This latter problem was exacerbated by the fact that African workers were generally attracted to sugar work by cash advances,⁵⁹ which were lost to employers in cases of desertion.

By the end of 1917 the shortage of labour had become so acute a problem that in January 1918 a deputation of sugarmill and coalmine owners travelled to Cape Town to meet with the Minister of Native Affairs. Consequently the Minister appointed a Departmental Committee to investigate the labour question in Natal.⁶⁰ It was found that as at mid-1918 sugarmillers experienced a 40% shortage of African labour,

⁵⁶ TAD, GNLB 81, Notes of Meeting between Prime Minister and Natal Labour Association, 16.3.1914.

⁵⁷ Sugar companies appeared confused by the regulations surrounding recruitment licences, as see TAD, GNLB 253, 357/16/53, A.Boulle (Tongaat) to Director of Native Labour, 1.2.1918; and TAD, NA 7, 42/15/F2, J.M.Pearce (Illovo) to Minister of Justice, 28.8.1919.

⁵⁸ See SASJ 9:3(1925), p.203.

⁵⁹ See TAD, GNLB 252, Shortage of Native Labour Committee's Durban Evidence, 22.6.1918; and House of Assembly, Annexure N^o 53, 1919.

⁶⁰ House of Assembly, Annexure N^o 53, 1919.

which was related to a considerable extent to the 10% annual depreciation in the numbers of Indian workers available to them. While supporting the employers' plea to have some assistance from the government, the Committee made the recommendation that was to be oft-repeated, namely that by "sympathetic" treatment and improved conditions would a positive response be elicited from African workers.⁶¹ The Transvaal mine-owners were regarded as better employers, and this observation may have been what prompted W.A.Campbell to send an employee to study conditions on the mines.⁶²

By this stage, during 1918, the majority of sugarmillers had joined forces to form the Natal Coast Labour Recruiting Corporation (NCLRC). The NCLRC's secretary, Eadie (who was also secretary of SASA), had given evidence to the Departmental Committee of the Corporation's system of seeking recruits in Zululand, Swaziland, and the Transkei, through the medium of white agents.⁶³ Immediately after the Committee had made its report the NCLRC resumed applying pressure on the government to facilitate the recruitment of labour in Moçambique and the tropical British colonies.⁶⁴ Although others did employ African workers from British colonies to the north,⁶⁵ Campbell would appear to have been the most successful in drawing "tropical labour".⁶⁶ In 1919 it was observed that, at Mount Edgecombe, Campbell

had employed 200 to 300 Makalangas some little time back

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² TAD, GNLB 253, 357/16/53, W.Campbell to Director of Native Labour, 25.3.1918.

⁶³ TAD, GNLB 252, Shortage of Native Labour Committee's Durban Evidence, 22.6.1918.

⁶⁴ TAD, GNLB 252, NCLRC to Secretary for Native Labour, 23.12.1918 and 3.1.1919.

⁶⁵ Umfolozi was one of these, as see the application for passes for 5 men and 3 of their wives who had travelled from Nyasaland to begin a second term at the sugarmill (NAD, CNC, 1916/1874, Passes Inward, 1916).

⁶⁶ NAD, CNC, 1917/2105, Natal Estates' Application for 140 "tropical" workers, 11.4.1917.

who arrived looking like skeletons and went back pig fat. He had never had a finer type of labourer. Man for man they were the equal at the end of their term of the Indian. They came for 12 months and stayed 15 and would have stayed longer but for the Influenza Epidemic which frightened them away.⁶⁷

The NCIIRC was essentially a millers' organisation, but representing also a small number of growers. It was never made clear what proportion of labour recruited by the Corporation went into sugarmill work, but there exists at least one document suggesting that such ambiguity was deliberate secrecy: it was alleged that African workers recruited by sugarmillers were first put to field work and registered as agricultural labour, and then later moved into the sugarmills without being accorded their rights in terms of industrial legislation.⁶⁸

Whatever the means so far employed by sugarmillers in their struggle to cope with the passing of the Indian indenture system, the onset of the inter-war economic depression introduced a labour situation which they could handle without difficulty. On the eve of the depression the black workforce on Natal sugarmillers' properties was as shown in Table 11. The data for 1926 indicate the order of the proportion of sugar company employees who were sugarmill workers; they also specify the prevailing racial division of sugarmill labour.

As the depression deepened local African labour became more plentiful,⁶⁹

⁶⁷ TAD, GNLB 308, Notes of Meeting, 26.11.1919.

⁶⁸ TAD, GNLB 253, 357/16/53, Secretary for Native Affairs to Director of Native Labour, 23.10.1919.

⁶⁹ It is significant that the Department of Native Affairs was particularly concerned with the effects of the depression and the drought on unemployment levels on the Witwatersrand; and it instructed Native Commissioners to restrict the movement of Africans to the gold, diamond, and manganese mines. (NAD, Lower Umfolozi Magisterial Archives, 3/4/9/1, Secretary for Native Affairs' Circular, 25.1.1932; Secretary for Native Affairs' Circular, 11.2.1932; Director of Native Labour's Circular, 17.3.1933).

TABLE 11: SUGAR WORKERS IN NATAL: 1920, 1923, and 1926

	African Workers 1920	AFRICAN WORKERS, 1923										SUGARMILL WORKERS, 1926				
		Basutoland	Nyasaland	Cape	Natal/ Zululand	Northern Rhodesia	Swaziland	Transvaal	Mozambique	Other	TOTAL	African	Indian	Coloured	White	TOTAL
<u>South Coast</u>																
Umzinkulu				63	103						166	167	92		2	261
Esperanza				958	231						1 189	177	166	5	42	390
J W Kirkman	60	2		67	95						164	20	18	4	3	45
E W Hawksworth	350			96	329						425	130	120	4	13	267
Renishaw		53			137					274	464	88	112		21	221
Illovo	540			325	543						868	175	220		29	424
Prospecton	20			31	117						148	15	40		4	59
Hulsar	130											224	182		64	470
S A Refinery	65															
<u>North Coast</u>																
Mount Edgecombe	1 056	24		154	733			7	2		920					
Ottawa	180			66	91						157					
Central Factory	156	1		50	240		1				292	40	100		21	161
La Mercy	180	50	2	111	77						240	62	144		26	232
Tongaat	540	76		226	406			21			729	60	297		34	391
Chaka's Kraal	110		2	171	2			12			187	370	81		16	467
Tinley Manor	40	4	14	24	162						204	134	196		28	358
Gledhow	158	3		573	71						647	221	129		25	375
Melville	25			51	7						58	175	115	1	20	311
Glendale	25			30							30	77	157		11	245
New Guelderland	33			34	32						66	59	59		9	127
Darnall	200			183	107						290	420	203		44	667
<u>Zululand</u>																
Amatikulu	163	90		19	165	3					277	275	181		46	502
Emoyeni	5											168	5		8	181
Felixton	72	32		6	161						199	357	129		54	540
Empangeni (ZSM)	131			1	232				45		278	289	144		57	490
St Lucia (Umfolozi)	270															

Source: For 1920, TAD, GNLB 308, Inspectors to Director of Native Labour, 1921; for 1923, TAD, GNLB 308, Chief Native Commissioner to Secretary for Native Affairs, 1924; for 1926, Board of Trade and Industries, Report No 66, Report on the Sugar Industry, 1926.

and, literally as a result of starvation in the Reserves,⁷⁰ the NCLRC went into voluntary liquidation in 1931.⁷¹ But simultaneously, with the malaria epidemics which raged between 1929 and 1932, migrant African workers in Zululand "fleeing in fear to their homes left a trail of corpses behind them".⁷²

The Umfolozi sugarmill was the most severely affected by malaria. In 1926 Umfolozi's black workforce comprised two workers from outside Zululand for every worker from proximate areas of high malarial endemicity (primarily Tongaland); the sick rate of the former group was 45% against that of 10% for the latter group of workers.⁷³ Since 1926 only local workers were employed, and Swellengrebel in his 1931 Report on malaria in South Africa cited this as a case in support of his recommendation that the recruiting of workers for the malaria-affected districts be strictly confined to areas of high malarial endemicity.⁷⁴ The recommendation was followed in the 1934 revision of the Moçambique Convention.⁷⁵ While it may have brought relief to employers, by allowing workers from Moçambique into Zululand, the revision created a conduit for those workers who had their sights on employment on the Witwatersrand.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ SASJ 15:11(1931), p.695.

⁷¹ NAD, Lower Umfolozi Magisterial Archives, 3/4/9/1, Chief Native Commissioner's Circular, 11.12.1931.

⁷² **Report of the Native Farm Labour Committee 1937-39**, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1939.

⁷³ **Report on Investigation into Malaria in the Union of South Africa 1930-31**, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1931.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ See van der Horst, **Native Labour**. p.288; and for official interpretations of what the revisions implied for employers in Zululand, see NAD, Lower Umfolozi Magisterial Archives, 3/4/9/2, Chief Native Commissioner's Circular, 1.3.1935.

⁷⁶ On the flow of workers from Moçambique to the labour-saturated Witwatersrand, via the sugar belt (by means of passes issued to these workers in Natal after the termination of contracts with employers who were no longer obliged to repatriate foreign recruits), see NAD, Lower Umfolozi Magisterial Archives, 3/4/9/3, Secretary for Native Affairs' Circular, 27.11.1935; Chief Native Commissioner's Circular, 30.4.1936; and Chief Native Commissioner's Circular, 19.5.1936.

The Immigrant Sugarmill Artisanate: 1850-1905

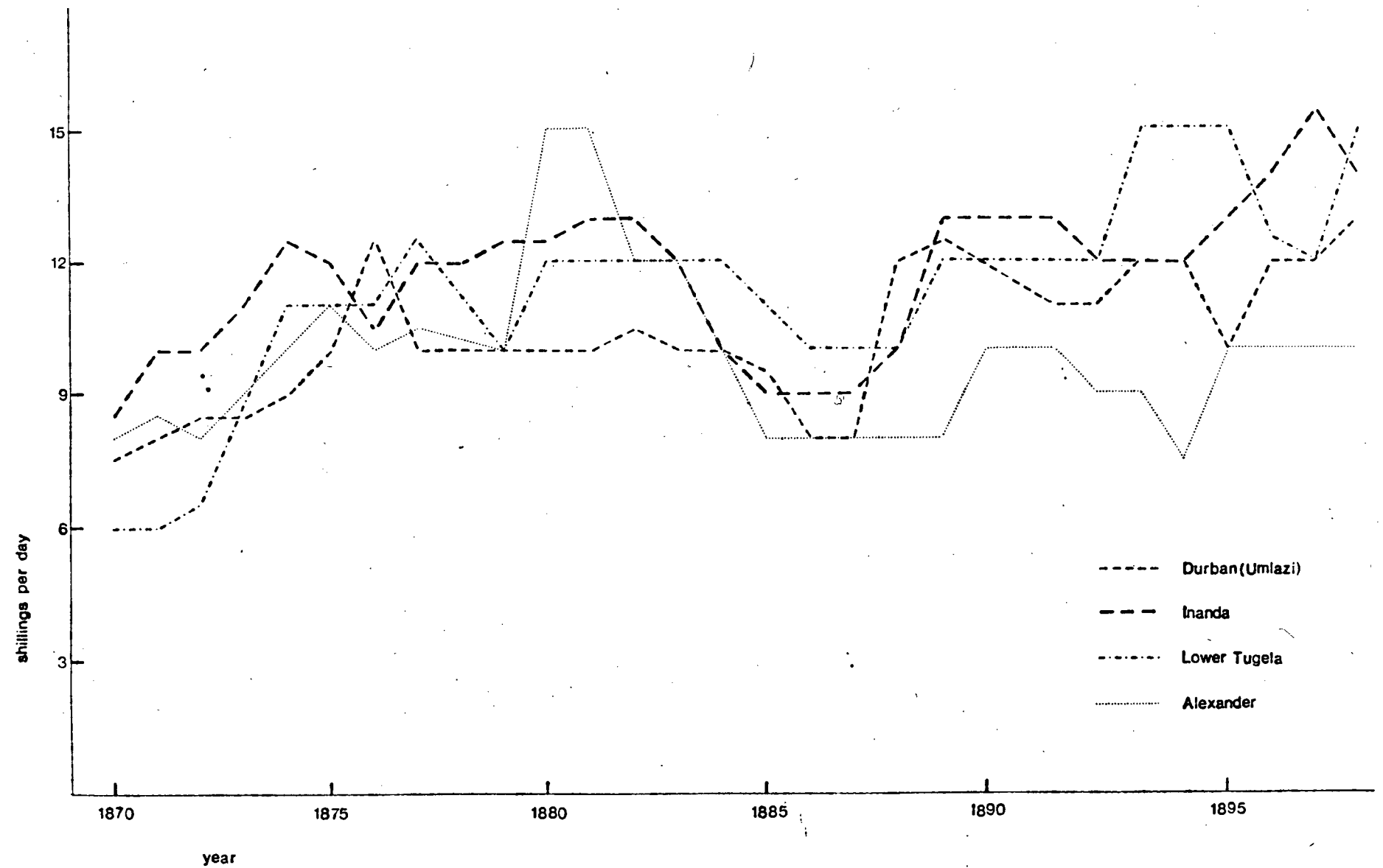
As the data recounted in the previous chapter show, nineteenth century open-pan sugarmills required few skilled men in their operation. These men, perhaps two or three in number and perhaps inclusive of the owner himself, were occupied primarily as mechanics or as sugar boilers. Every sugarmill also had a need for carpenters, wheelwrights, and blacksmiths in its allied workshops. Although reference has been made to one or two Indian sugar boilers and blacksmiths, it was British settlers who usually met these artisanal needs. It was said of colonial Natal's artisans that their "Trades are not so sharply defined as in England",⁷⁷ and the opinion was also expressed that because the savings of the "poor class artisan" were inadequate to pay his passage from Britain to Natal, the colony was "stocked with first class artisans".⁷⁸ As Figure 15 shows these colonial artisans were paid wages which fluctuated no less than, and in general correspondence with, black workers' wages. While the sugarmills absorbed British settlers to meet their artisanal needs, Britain was not the sole source of skilled operatives; when vacuum-pan technology and generally more sophisticated plant came to the Natal sugarmills after the mid-1870s, Mauritian artisans were favoured by employers.

Whereas some Mauritian artisans were already by then to be found in Natal's sugarmills, it was in 1878 that the first major influx of Mauritians occurred, when the newly formed Natal Central Sugar Company's sugarmill at Mount Edgecombe was opened: the milling plant, a Mauritian general manager, and the remainder of the skilled personnel required to operate the sugarmill came from Mauritius. (See Figure 16) This surge

⁷⁷ Handbook to South Africa. London: S.W.Silver, 1891, p.348.

⁷⁸ NLA Debates, Vol.45, 291, 1908.

FIGURE 15: WHITE ARTISANS' WAGES IN COLONIAL NATAL



Source: Blue Books.

FIGURE 16: MOUNT EDGECOMBE SUGARMILL'S WAGE BILL, 1899

EMPLOYEE	OCCUPATION	WAGES PER MENSEM
Elliott, H G	Office clerk	£ 15
Paul, W	Office clerk	10
Herisson, J E	Engineer	40
Morel, A C	Foreman	45
Adolphe, J	Pan boiler	40
Lauriecourt (Snr)	Workshop artisans	15
Lauriecourt (Jnr)		5
-		15
Adolphe		15
Lamarque (Snr)		12
Lamarque (Jnr)		5
-		5
-		10
Adolphe	Night foreman	10
-	Pan-floor assistants	7
-		7
-	Evaporator assistant	5
Others including estate overseers and unskilled workers		234
		<u>£495</u>

Source: KC, Sir Marshall Campbell, Letters, Vol 2.

of new immigrants destined for the Mount Edgecombe sugarmill was the commencement of a steady flow associated partly with the innovative vacuum-pan technology. However it was not only pan-boilers who came from Mauritius. Blacksmiths, fitters in some number, and other artisans were also imported by most of the larger millers.

The recruitment of these Mauritian workers required official approval, and it therefore sometimes involved correspondence between sugarmillers and government officials. Thus we find that in 1899 E.Saunders consulted the local magistrate before bringing to Tongaat two Indian engine drivers from Mauritius.⁷⁹ Correspondence was entered into when a permit was requested in 1902 for the wife and children of a Mauritian pan-boiler at Esperanza to travel from Australia to Natal to be with him,⁸⁰ and when Umhloti Valley Central Sugar Mill applied in 1903 for permission to allow two Mauritian engineers to enter Natal from Moçambique.⁸¹ When Hulett's applied in 1904 for permission to re-appoint two Mauritian workers who had previously been employed by the company, a letter of approval from the Mauritian authorities was required of them.⁸² A bond of £50 was asked of Saunders, who then took on the two workers under a contract which expired in 1905, when they returned to Mauritius.⁸³

There was a two-fold incentive for sugarmill artisans to emigrate from Mauritius when they did, and take up employment in Natal. On the one hand there are the effects of centralised sugarmilling in Mauritius to be considered, and on the other hand the promise of better conditions in Natal must be taken into account. A very rapid process of

⁷⁹ NAD, IRD 371/1899.

⁸⁰ NAD, IRD 794/1902.

⁸¹ NAD, IRD 187/1903.

⁸² NAD, IRD 415/1903; IRD 138/1904.

⁸³ NAD, IRD 1036/1905.

centralisation was under way in the Mauritian sugar industry at the same time that the demand in Natal for skilled sugarmill artisans was strengthening: in 1870 Mauritius had 218 sugarmills, and by 1892 there were 104 sugarmills on the island.⁸⁴ Inducements offered in Natal to immigrant artisans were attractive by Mauritian standards, with fitters in the late 1800s being offered in the region of £8 per month and a free house and servant, and pan-boilers £15 per month (to offset unemployment during the annual off-crop) and a house and servant.⁸⁵ The fact that the annual off-crop was of longer duration in Mauritius than it was in Natal meant also that some Natal sugarmillers could employ itinerant Mauritian artisans to do off-crop maintenance work.

Usually assigned to the sugarmill's workshops, fitters spent their time making, maintaining, and repairing plant, with few mechanical aids at their disposal. Their skills were thus manual skills which enabled them for example to wield hammer and chisel and precisely cut a key-way out of a solid steel shaft, a task requiring days of labour. Another arduous, and more common task of the fitters was to cut and shape teeth in the trash plates which combed fibre from the grooves of mill rollers. And blank cast-iron rollers were, since early this century, grooved by workshop hands according to detailed patterns. The exacting job of manufacturing patterns was undertaken in the sugarmill's pattern shop. An equally exacting job was that of the moulder, whose skills were applied in foundry work. All these artisans' workshops and the foundry were generally housed under the same roof as the sugarmill itself.

⁸⁴ R.Lamusse, "The Economic Development of the Mauritius Sugar Industry", *Revue Agricole et Sucriere de l'ile Maurice* 43:1(1964), pp.22-38; and A.North Coombes, *The Evolution of Sugar Cane Culture in Mauritius*. Port Louis: General Printing & Stationery, 1937, p.165.

⁸⁵ J.P.N.Bentley, "A Century of Sugar Milling", *Condenser* 3:2(1954), pp.36-39.

"Civilised Labour" in the Sugarmills: 1905 - late 1930s

Except for the sugar boiler, whose duties might have been performed by the manager, artisans in open-pan sugarmills had all been essentially maintenance workers who were not directly involved in sugar processing. An increase in the size of the processing artisanate was thus one of the more important consequences of technological change, while the more precise division of artisanal labour was another. For white manual labour in general the consequences were deeper. As sugar technology advanced, whites were taken into the sugarmills as semi-skilled weighbridge attendants, crane drivers, and locomotive drivers, *inter alia*, and later as process overseers and laboratory assistants.

A qualitatively important episode in the history of white manual sugarmill labour occurred in the aftermath of the 1913 Indian strike. On Christmas eve, 1913, E.Saunders wrote a letter to Smuts in which he made the following appeal:

In consequence of the Indian Strike it has become imperative to look for other sources of labour, and I would very much like to try the experiment of employing poor whites...

I would like to start with to get about six young fellows, say of from 18 - 25 years of age and place them in the more responsible positions now held by Indians. If possible I would like to get young men who have been accustomed to work on railway construction or elsewhere, who have enough education to be able at any rate to keep the time of Indians & Natives. As to start with I propose employing them as Gangers. If the experiment is satisfactory I wish to bring others into positions now occupied by the more Intelligent Indians...

...let me know if such a class of young Dutchman is available and if so what would be regarded as a reasonable rate of pay.⁸⁶

Saunders was being extremely cautious. It was not a question of replacing Indian workers wholesale that he had in mind, and he was not

⁸⁶ TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, E.Saunders to Smuts, 24.12.1913.

committing himself to the employment of all comers.

Reporting to the Secretary for Mines and Industries a year later, Saunders expressed his view that "a good deal of picking and choosing" would in future be necessary if his experience with the nine poor white workers he had employed was anything to go by.⁸⁷ The germ of an idea had nevertheless been sown, and the Deputy Commissioner of Mines in Natal met with sugarmillers early in 1915 to discuss the possibility of employing poor whites on a large scale. C.G.Smith took it upon himself to solicit the opinions of employers in the industry on the issue, and over 200 letters were sent from his offices during February 1915. Interestingly, the discourse surrounding the issue took a turn away from the terms used by Saunders in his earlier letter to Smuts, as Smith opined in his circular that "It would undoubtedly be a splendid thing for the country if an opening could be found for the permanent employment of these unfortunate white people".⁸⁸ Patriotism rather than the lessons of the 1913 strike was now at the base of the discourse.

As it turned out, the employment of poor whites in the sugar industry probably never reached the levels anticipated by government officials, and the scheme certainly did not have deep consequences for the composition of the country's sugarmilling workforce. The responses of sugarmillers to Smith's circular exposed the reasons for this unexpected outcome. William Campbell wrote that

both father and I had a long conversation with the Assistant Inspector of Mines of Natal on this matter, and both of us feel that on public grounds, if on no other, the Industry should employ a number of these men and we are ourselves quite prepared to give the experiment a fair trial. From what we could gather...the class of man would be quite illiterate and

⁸⁷ TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, E.Saunders to Secretary for Mines and Industries, 7.12.1914.

⁸⁸ TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, C.G.Smith to Sugarmillers, 12.2.1915.

unfit for anything else but manual labour. We feel certain that in the Factory and yard one of these men could replace at least two Indians as they should put more "beef" and intelligence into their work...

So far as our particular Estates are concerned, we would have very little room in the fields for these men as we have a large white staff and we take the very greatest care in the selection of this Field Staff, who are all of gentle birth and refinement...

...We continually have to import from Mauritius for our technical staff because we can get no one to train here. We would take four young Dutch lads right away in this branch, but they must...be able to read and write.⁸⁹

Similarly, G.S.Armstrong, believing that those poor whites who were taken on should be apprenticed, noted that

there is a very great difficulty at the present moment in getting good Pan Boilers and Sugar Makers in Natal, in fact, we are entirely dependent on the Mauritians in this regard.

We would be quite prepared to try 3 or 4 of these young men during the coming season.⁹⁰

Frank Reynolds was most guarded in his remark that

We have already had experience of employing them on this estate, and have found that they tamper with our Natives, and are altogether undesirable people.⁹¹

The Umhloti Valley Central Sugar Mill and Estate Company was reported to have made an offer to employ three "preferably married, men, who must be poor Dutch men, as overseers",⁹² and New Guelderland offered "a free house to a competent Blacksmith & handyman who has one or two daughters willing and capable of acting as mothers helps and Nurses".⁹³ It was apparent that where interest had been shown in the scheme, sugarmillers had skilled and/or educated men in mind as recruits for sugarmill work. All told, there was little enthusiasm for the poor white scheme, and available evidence suggests that very few poor whites were taken into the sugar industry, and then only a small proportion of those went into the sugarmills.

⁸⁹ TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, W.A.Campbell to C.G.Smith, 15.2.1915.

⁹⁰ TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, G.S.Armstrong to C.G.Smith, 19.2.1915.

⁹¹ TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, F.Reynolds to C.G.Smith, 17.2.1915.

⁹² TAD, MNW 238, MM 1275/14, Assistant Inspector White Labour to Secretary for Mines and Industries, 3.5.1915.

⁹³ Ibid.

The divisions amongst workers who were classified as neither Africans nor Indians were less precise than those that existed amongst black workers. Regional origins had a bearing on the differentiation that did take place with respect to workers who were not regarded as blacks, as indeed had racial considerations. However not all of these workers were regarded as whites, even if they enjoyed a relatively privileged status compared with that of black unskilled workers and the few black workers who did acquire skills. These manual workers who were neither Africans nor Indians were, in the rubric of South Africa's erstwhile post-colonial rulers, "civilised labour" deserving of preferential treatment.

Long before the civilised labour policy had seen the light of day J.L.Hulett had spoken out on his commitment to employing whites in preference to blacks;⁹⁴ he had also caused a furore in certain circles for having stated that a special tax should be levied on Indian workers in clerical jobs;⁹⁵ and E.Saunders had in 1921 expressed the view before the Unemployment Commission that coastal employers would employ whites before blacks.⁹⁶

Then in 1925 the NSMA drafted a statement to the Wages and Economic Commission, which included references to the blend, in sugar production, "of uncivilised labour, indigenous or imported, and European inventive genius and managerial energy";⁹⁷ and to the "considerable ingenuity [which] has to be displayed in so balancing the European staff that it can be employed during the off-season".⁹⁸ This view was ultimately to become embedded in the legislation which upheld the Pact Government's

⁹⁴ *NIA Debates*, Vol.41, 137-140, 4.12.1906.

⁹⁵ *Indian Opinion* 23.5.1908.

⁹⁶ *SASJ* 5:2(1921), p.165.

⁹⁷ *African Sugar and Cotton Planter* 1:12(1925), pp.3-8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

"civilised labour policy". As Davies has shown,⁹⁹ it was by means of four devices (and attendant propaganda) that the state implemented this policy in an attempt to address the "poor white problem": the 1922 Apprenticeship Act; the 1925 Customs Tariff Act; the 1925 Wage Act; and "fair labour" clauses in tendered government contracts.

Another upshot of the "civilised labour policy" was an amendment in 1926 to the Mines and Works Act which now defined skilled Mauritians as "civilised"; as the Minister of Labour later put it, they were so regarded "provided that they conform to European standards of living".¹⁰⁰ Because special statutory provision had been made for "creole" Mauritian artisans, their position in Natal's sugarmills was obviously a curious one. Employers' attitudes towards these artisans were seldom publicly articulated, one of those occasions being in 1926 when C.G. Smith spoke in the South African Senate:

As regards the labour position in the sugar industry, that is a point again which the Government should watch very carefully. I have made this accusation against the sugar industry in Natal; they have never paid the district wages for skilled workers. They have never done so. There was only one occasion when they approached near to that scale, and at that time there was an enormous scarcity of skilled men. They prefer to get Creoles, and while I am not saying anything derogatory to their cleverness or their smartness at the work, or that they are not good tradesmen, I do say that the reason they are engaged, is because they are cheaper than white men. Another objection to Creole labour is that they come from Mauritius on a kind of holiday during the repair season and they work in the sugarmills during that period, and for less wages than the local [i.e. permanently settled] Creoles get, and then they go back to Mauritius again.¹⁰¹

Certainly by the time the Board of Trade and Industries reported on the sugar industry in 1926, whites were seen to have replaced "coloureds"

99 R.H. Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979, pp.199-228.

100 Quoted in *Race Relations* 2:5(1935), pp.55-61.

101 *Senate Debates*, 1239, 1926.

(presumably Mauritians) in the boiling house and engineering departments. On the other hand the Board found that Indian centrifugal workers had been replaced by Africans rather than whites, and that this was inappropriate, except in Zululand where the climate might "render this type of work somewhat trying for Europeans".¹⁰² This was no less of an inconsistency that was being noted than that surrounding the replacement of white with Indian laboratory workers. A further example of the sugarmillers' inconsistency in this respect was the way in which the company owning the Doornkop sugarmill put 22 unemployed white men to work as cane cutters during 1932 for 1/6 per day, the prevailing wage for black cane cutters.¹⁰³ When in 1933 representatives of the sugar industry met with the Minister of Labour, it transpired that they had (ostensibly at least) been acting in the belief that they were expected by the government not to employ any more "non-Europeans".¹⁰⁴

Though white workers were generally advantaged, the sugarmillers' search for cheaper labour did not allow for formal colour bars in unskilled categories of work. And, because skilled Mauritian workers were variously classified in terms of racist ideology, sugarmillers had to openly oppose job colour bars. The editor of the **SASJ** must have been airing the views of sugarmillers when in 1935 he referred to the imminent parliamentary reading of a minimum wage bill:

we have a large number of Mauritians of different shades and races most of them brainy and clever at their work, and good law-abiding citizens who deserve a lot more than they get.

We wonder if Mr Fourie [Minister of Labour] would expect a Mauritian chemist, with a tinge of colour, which he could not help, to be superseded by a chemist with a purely white skin...And the same applies to the

¹⁰²Board of Trade and Industries, Report N^o 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry**, 1926.

¹⁰³**Natal Mercury** 12.5.1932.

¹⁰⁴**SASJ** 17:10(1933), p.523. Between 1925 and 1935 there was a 56% increase in the number of whites employed in the sugar industry (**SASJ** 19:4(1935), pp.201-203).

engineering workshops, where there are numerous Mauritians and coloured workmen. They are conscientious workmen, experienced and capable.¹⁰⁵

This was a recognition, if not an admission, of the level of exploitation specific to "creole" artisans. If it conveyed a transparently patronising attitude towards Mauritian employees, it also indicated that skin colour was not accepted as grounds for appointing to skilled positions "conscientious workmen" who were also "good law-abiding citizens".

Sugarmillers obviously dealt with the question of white labour preference in an ambivalent fashion. Skills and relative costs determined the manner in which workers of different "racial" categories were employed in Natal's sugarmills. While racism aided and abetted the cause of wage minimisation through the cost-effective division of occupational strata, sugarmillers were not averse to placing cheap black labour in positions formerly occupied by more expensive white labour. Skills and wages were far more critical factors than racist ideology when sugarmillers came to implementing white labour preference. As was seen in Chapter 4, it was more a question of employing the most skilled workers at the lowest rates of pay without having to incur the costs of training; the question of control (or "obedience") being an important factor when it came to selecting workers for assignment to any particular branch of the sugar industry.

The Reproduction of the Racial Division of Sugarmill Labour

Plainly, neither racism nor relative costs were the sole determinants of the peculiarities of the sugarmill's division of labour: although superficially inseparable, ideological and material imperatives had

¹⁰⁵ SASJ 19:1(1935), pp.3-7.

complementary but distinct roles to play, and racism, like legal statutes, worked primarily as a qualifying or affirmative factor. In other words, the racial division of sugarmill labour was not at the outset simply a response to the proscriptions of racist ideology; rather than being a causal pre-requisite, racism acted as a catalyst. In any event, the racial basis for the division of labour had not shown signs of weakening by World War II, nor had its wider ideological and material context diminished in influence.

The colonialist epithets "coolie" and "kaffir" enjoyed wide usage in the sugarmills long after they were replaced in official and company nomenclature. Similarly the term "creole" was sometimes applied to Mauritians who were not regarded as "European" or "French", which is quite different from the use of the term elsewhere to denote those born in the colonies, for all Mauritian immigrants fell into that category. Thus "creole" became in Natal a qualified synonym for "coloured". The pejorative connotations of these terms related in part to notions of "racial" or cultural superiority held by those who voiced them, and no sector of the workforce was excluded from claims to such superiority. In another, related sense they were historically derived terms, reinforced by the conformity of subjects to the imagery upon which the terms were based.

The "lazy native" and the "untrustworthy Indian" are two stereotypes that have already been encountered. Their resilience and their resistance to conditions of indenture and wage-labour in the formative years of the Natal sugar industry were interpreted by their masters as traits, both natural and cultural, of all Africans and Indians. What is more, many of the said masters had previous experience in other colonies where the racist imagery of their class had a long history. Once

indolence, insubordination, and dishonesty, or mental capabilities and intelligence (the "more intelligent Indian"), were understood to be cultural attributes, employers could find another reason to relegate black workers to menial tasks, over and above the fact that there were no skilled blacks in Natal in the early colonial period; the "original sins" could not be absolved by skill or Christianity once super-exploitation had become connected, both in ideology and in practice, with blacks. Certainly some blacks were relatively privileged as a result of employers' attempts to avoid the expense of white labour, but this was precisely because they were black, relatively cheap, and tractable. To have acquired the same skill as whites did not mean that the same occupational status had been achieved, nor did it give the black worker immunity to stereotypification.

The reproduction of racial skill divisions in the sugarmill was neither simply a structural phenomenon nor solely contingent upon ideological connivances and sectarian imagery. There were also other factors which gave continuity to the racial division of labour, most notably the network of relationships amongst various strata of the sugarmill's workforce which brought successive generations of subordinate and managerial employees into juxtaposition. Patterns of occupational mobility and occupational inheritance amongst three categories of employees are now presented in order to illustrate this point; Indian workers, Mauritian artisans, and managerial and senior technical employees are considered respectively.

In the case of Indian workers who were neither indentured nor artisans, their movement within the twentieth century sugarmill was greater than that of any other category of employee. Although there were many who for decades remained "office boys", laboratory assistants, or such like,

Indian sugarmill employees were often put through a haphazard variety of jobs during their working lives. The sequence of occupations of eight Indian workers formerly at the Illovo sugarmill illustrates this point quite clearly.¹⁰⁶ (See Figure 17.)

Some information about these particular workers may be safely taken as being generally applicable to their contemporaries throughout Natal's sugarmills: they, mostly born of indentured parents, began working at an early age for the company served by their parents; they were consequently minimally or un-schooled; their first assignment was to the fields or to menial tasks in the sugarmill or office; their first promotion was based on criteria other than skill; and, a transfer from field work to sugarmill work was an important promotion as it implied less strenuous work under more regulated and predictable conditions, as well as bringing an increment in wages.

The individual histories reveal less obvious aspects of sugarmill work as it was experienced by Indian workers before World War II. In most cases job mobility within the sugarmill took place on a lateral plane rather than being promotional. Where significant upward mobility in the hierarchy of occupations did take place, it may be hypothesised that the worker in question was the beneficiary of a more or less informal process of selection. For a few, such as the worker A.A., skill did have a part to play but only once the opportunity to learn that skill had, perhaps randomly, presented itself. No less fortuitous were the promotions of the sort given to workers such as P.K. or V.P. who, as "tea boys" in daily contact with managers, were in a position personally and without the mediation of overseers or sirdars to make an impression

¹⁰⁶Similar case histories abound in the journals of the sugar industry. See for example *Condenser* 5:5(1967), pp.20-24; *Nkosibomvu* (December 1981), p.5; and *SASJ* 59:1(1975), p.27.

FIGURE 17: INDIAN SUGARMILL WORKERS' OCCUPATIONAL HISTORIES

WORKER	BIRTH	FIRST JOB AT ILLOVO	SUBSEQUENT WORK/DEPT AT ILLOVO
A A	1914	At age 15 as cane picker	Juice heaters; icing plant; carpentry shop; jelly pan; refined pan sugar boiler; raw sugar pan boiler; senior pan boiler
T A	1902 India	At age 7 as weeder	Cane picker/roads gang; 'tarmbu boy'; 'brake-boy'; mule truck driver; platelayer; centrifugal operator; platelayer; factory cleaner
A B	1908 Port Shepstone	At age 10 as weeder	Centrifugal operator; millyard crane driver; pipe-fitter
K G		1929 as millyard cleaner	Revivifier attendant; crystallizer attendant; 'oil-boy'; generator attendant
P K	India	At age 13 as 'tea-boy' for Wm Pearce	Laboratory; wax plant; sugar floor sirdar; generator attendant; clarification sirdar
A M	1922 Illovo	At age 13 as weeder	Transport dept; millyard cleaner; platelayers gang; hospital hygiene gang; barracks cleaner
F M	1901 Tonga	At age 22 as syrup melt tank	Carpenter's handyman; shift fitters handyman; vacuum pump attendant; mill engine driver
V P	1908	At age 15 as 'tea-boy'	'Mule-boy'; centrifugal operator; crystallizer attendant; time-card checker

Sources: *Illovo Digest*, March (1969), p 16; December (1971), p 23; March (1972), p 22; March (1973), p 22; June (1973), p 34; December (1973), p 10; March (1974), pp 19-20.

of diligence and loyalty. Others may have benefitted from the favourable records of their fathers. Indeed, occupational inheritance must always have been a factor which either marred or improved the promotional chances of successive generations of workers, such as the three children of V.P. who followed him into the Illovo Sugar Co.. Another Indian worker, M.P. (not included in Figure 17), who began his 55-year service to the same company in 1916 at the age of 10, had five sons with Illovo;¹⁰⁷ and M.C., who began there in 1925 at the age of 15, could reflect on the relative success of his eldest son, a bench chemist, and two other sons, apprentices, with the company.

In summary, the hypothesis is that the occupational histories of Indian workers were, before World War II, dependent upon an informal procedure of recognition, the chances of that recognition being enhanced by factors largely beyond the control of the workers themselves. After the War the pattern was slow to change, and still in the 1950s it could be bluntly stated that as far as these workers were concerned "a lack of schools keeps them largely illiterate, and ignorance of employment opportunities elsewhere, together with the absence of savings, confines them to the same occupation".¹⁰⁸

Regarding Mauritian artisans, there were numerous instances of family succession in particular sugarmills, frequently in the very same line of work. Figure 18 speaks for itself on this point. Occupational inheritance *per se*, with men going into the same positions held by their fathers or uncles was most evident amongst pan-boilers. A case in point

¹⁰⁷Illovo Digest (December 1975), p.26.

¹⁰⁸H.R.Burrows, *Indian Life and Labour in Natal*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1952, p.19. On the wages paid to Indian sugarmill workers, and on their general working conditions in the early 1950s, see also C.A.Woods, *The Indian Community of Natal*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp.25-27.

FIGURE 18: A SELECTIVE LIST SHOWING THE FAMILY TIES OF
NON-MANAGERIAL MAURITIAN SUGARMILL EMPLOYEES
IN NATAL IN 1934

GROUPINGS BY NAME	OCCUPATION	SUGARMILL
Aa	Overseer	Tonga
Ab	Weighbridge Clerk	Tonga
Ac	Learner	Tonga
Ad	Juice Preparer	Sezela
Ae	Bench Chemist	Gledhow
Ba	Apprentice Fitter	Mount Edgecombe
Bb	Fitter	Central Factory
Ca	Juice Preparer	Tonga
Cb	Learner Overseer	Tonga
Cc	Fitter	Gledhow
Cd	Shift Overseer	Gledhow
Da	Compound Manager	Tinley Manor
Db	Pan Boiler	Tinley Manor
Dc	Pan Boiler	Felixton
Ea	Fitter	Tonga
Eb	Centrifugal Supervisor	Tonga
Fa	Shift Overseer	Gledhow
Fb	Apprentice Fitter	Gledhow
Ga	Fitter	Tonga
Gb	Apprentice Pan Boiler	Mount Edgecombe
Ha	Overseer	Amatikulu
Hb	Pan Boiler	Amatikulu
Hc	Pan Boiler	Empangeni
Ia	Turner	Mount Edgecombe
Ib	Turner	Mount Edgecombe
Ic	Turner	Mount Edgecombe
Id	Apprentice Moulder	Mount Edgecombe
Ja	Fitter	Tonga
Jb	Fitter	Mount Edgecombe
Ka	Pan Boiler	Tonga
Kb	Moulder	Tonga
Kc	Learner	Tonga
La	Boilerman	Central Factory
Lb	Pan Boiler	Empangeni
Ma	Pan Boiler	Sezela
Mb	Pan Boiler	Sezela
Na	Pan Boiler	Esperanza
Nb	Pan Boiler	Umfolozo
Oa	Carpenter	Tonga
Ob	Carpenter	Tonga
Oc	Learner	Tonga
Od	Pan Boiler	Felixton

Source: *South African Sugar Year Book and Directory (1934)*.

is that of a former pan-boiler whose maternal grandfather emigrated from Mauritius in the 1870s to be employed in Natal as a sugarmill's blacksmith. His four uncles - the sons of his maternal grandfather - became sugarmill artisans in Natal, two of them as pan-boilers. On the other side of his family, his paternal grandfather came from Mauritius last century to work as an artisan in Durban, and his father, who was 12 when they disembarked in Durban, subsequently became a pan-boiler. His uncles on that side of his family were also sugarmill artisans, one as a pan-boiler. When he himself began sugarmill work in the 1930s, he was taught the skills of pan-boiling by a 72 year old Mauritian.¹⁰⁹

By contrast to the above two categories of sugarmill employees, chemists, engineers, and managers had quite different occupational histories. These senior employees were sometimes transferred from one sugarmill to another belonging to the same company; they also appear to have changed employers far more frequently than the former two groups. (See Figure 19.)

Other instances where movement between sugarmills took place included the cases of P.G. and W.D.. In 1922 P.G. was appointed as the chemist in the Amatikulu sugarmill after his arrival there from a sugarmill on the Zambezi.¹¹⁰ Three years later, by which time he had been made factory manager and chief chemist of the Darnall sugarmill, P.G. was in a position to advertise his services thus:

To Sugar Millers

A thoroughly competent Factory Manager and Chemist, age 32, desires position in large progressive central factory, particularly where experience can be gained. Fifteen years in Mauritius, Natal, Zululand and Mocambique; for past three years manager and chief chemist of one of the largest central mills in

¹⁰⁹Interview with the subject, Tongaat, 28.6.1982.

¹¹⁰SASJ 6:5(1922), p.331.

Natal...Speaks English, French and Portuguese fluently, also Indian dialects.¹¹¹

Similarly, the far more experienced W.D. went from Mauritius to Natal, via Australia; then to Moçambique; back to Natal; and, after relinquishing his post as general manager of Umfolozi, he was involved with staff training in the Sena sugarmills of Moçambique, before finally retiring in Natal.¹¹²

FIGURE 19: MOVEMENTS OF SELECTED ENGINEERS AND CHEMISTS, 1930-1960

G B	Chief Chemist - Umfolozi; Chief Chemist - Doornkop; Factory Manager - Doornkop
H C	Chief Engineer - Umzinkulu; Chief Engineer - Central Factory; Chief Engineer - Tongaat
D H	Chief Chemist - Tongaat; Factory Manager - Tongaat; Factory Manager - Esperanza; Factory Manager - Renishaw
C J	Chief Chemist - New Guelderland; Factory Manager - Darnall; General Manager - Empangeni
D M	Factory Manager - Doornkop; General Manager - Doornkop; General Manager - Umfolozi
L S	Manager - La Mercy; Factory Manager - Chaka's Kraal
J W	Chief Engineer - Tongaat; Chief Engineer - Prospecton

Source: *South African Sugar Journal* *passim*.

What is especially interesting about P.G. and W.D. is that during their working lives they travelled across international borders, going from one sugar producing region to another. Such ease of movement could be

¹¹¹SASJ 9:9(1925), p.635.

¹¹²SASJ 11:8(1927), p.509, 13:12(1929), p.79, and 35:1(1951), p.63.

said to have been widely shared among senior employees, given the relatively small size of that component of the workforce. It was by this international movement that Natal gained a net inflow of Mauritian personnel, and by this movement too that Natal-trained chemists, engineers, and managers made their way to Moçambique, Kenya, and elsewhere.¹¹³

The most obvious point that can be deduced from the foregoing is that each of the three categories of sugarmill employees discussed had quite distinctive occupational histories. This observation can now be extended by saying that sectional occupational histories, such as these, were at once a product of the system of racially divided sugarmill labour, and a stimulant for the perseverance of that system. In addition to giving momentum to the system, occupational inheritance held successive generations of manual workers in a relationship with managers and owners which, as is later shown, was conducive to dependence and quiescence. The long term ties of entire families of workers to particular companies were strengthened by the relative immobility of manual workers. Although senior employees were far more mobile, many nevertheless stayed in one sugarmill or with a particular company for many decades. In this way a somewhat personalised relationship was maintained between managers and lineages of workers throughout the industry; the careers and reputations of engineers, chemists, and managers could be followed and discussed by their subordinates whose collective and family networks preceded and outlasted the presence of individual bosses; workers' reputations and careers were not unaffected by the records of other family members; and the structure of the industry was such that strong social connections were made between the

¹¹³For examples see SASJ 13:5(1929), p.263, 14:4(1930), p.229, and 15:7(1931), p.435.

various sugarmills.

Summary

On the face of things, the form taken by the racial division of sugarmill labour in Natal might be explained simply as a microcosm of the social division of labour in South Africa. Historical analysis shows the superficial consistency to have arisen largely from impulses which were specific to the sugar industry. There are two themes in particular which are seen to have underlain that impetus within the sugar industry. Firstly, the nature of the industry necessitated an internally dualistic labour process. The sugarocracy was always compelled to compete for workers for its labour intensive field operations, while simultaneously having to maintain a corps of variously skilled sugarmill workers. In striving to meet this imperative, sugarmillers laid the foundations for the racial division of sugarmill labour. Secondly, although the system was continuously being internally modified, its racial basis was not disturbed.

As a system, the racial division of sugarmill labour was originally squarely of the sugarmillers' making, but later they could depend on its reproduction without their intervention: the role of the sugarocracy had passed from an instrumental to a more passive stewardship over the racial division of sugarmill labour. Although the system persisted, the sugarmillers did not balk before replacing white workers with lower-paid black workers when opportunities arose to do so. As is demonstrated in the following chapter, when in the decade before the take-over of sugarmilling by the industrial corporations ostensible efforts were made to "de-racialise" the sugarmilling labour process, these were overshadowed by structural and ideological continuities. These

continuities were manifested in segregationist policies in the sugarmill and, as Chapter 7 shows, in the sugar village.

CHAPTER SIX
AUTHORITY, CONTROL, AND AUTONOMY

The social group over which sugarocrats have historically expected to command authority may be described as a relatively closed community. Sugarocratic dominion over this community has usually prevailed until internal corporate growth dissipated family control, or sugar companies became subsidiaries to larger, usually multinational corporations. An interesting anomaly in the global context, was the Pernambuco sugarocracy, which demonstrated a reluctance to expand its operations beyond the scope of family control. Far more common was the course followed in the proximate São Paulo region of Brazil where expansion proceeded vigorously under pressure from professional managers.¹ Generally then, formal control over the sugarmill and its community has passed from sugarocrats to professional administrators.

After laying out a theoretical basis for the study of control, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to an examination of control over sugarmill work. The analysis attends to four main features of control: the role of the sugarmill owner as operative, and the consequences of his departure from the sugarmill itself; the authority of factory managers, engineers, and chemists, and their respective claims to control over technical processes; the question of occupational autonomy as it has been experienced by pan-boilers; and the development of structural control.

¹ K.S.Taylor, **Sugar and the Underdevelopment of Northeastern Brazil, 1500-1970**. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978, pp.79-80. An article of related interest, which offers an alternative view of Pernambuco sugarmillers, is E-S.Pang, "Modernization and Slavocracy in Nineteenth-Century Brazil", **Journal of Interdisciplinary History** 9:4(1979), pp.667-688.

Control and Authority

Bourgeois control over working people may be gained in a number of ways, and with varying degrees of subtlety. Compliance might at the one extreme be achieved by outright coercion, and at the other extreme it might be a consequence of ideologically uncontested bourgeois control. Both situations are likely to occur only in limited amounts, if at all, as they come into direct conflict with the social relations of capitalist production - coercion destabilises class relations, and consensus over the objectives and organisation of production is an elusive goal of the bourgeoisie. A more likely intermediate situation, exhibiting some stability in the long term, is one in which control is achieved by means of a

structure of sanctions and rewards deployed by the owners and/or agents of capital to maintain and promote their authority in the work place. All such systems of control employ elements of control and legitimation, albeit in differing degrees and forms. The hierarchy of occupational status and the technical division of labour also form important parts of management control systems.²

As the above quotation suggests, occupational hierarchy and the technical division of labour can be counted amongst the systems of domination and control within the sugarmill. Then there is the coercive aspect of control to be considered. Violence and brutality perpetrated by overseers upon unskilled labourers are the most conspicuous type of direct coercion. More subtle forms of compulsion, which may nevertheless imply the threat of force, are found *inter alia* in particular systems of labour recruitment and associated methods of driving subsistence agriculturalists into wage labour;³ in systems of

² C.Scott, "The Labour Process, Class Conflict and Politics in the Peruvian Sugar Industry", *Development and Change* 10:1(1979), pp.57-89.

³ Reference has already been made in Chapter 5 to the cases of Moçambique and Peru.

surveillance over worker organisation;⁴ and in the payment of workers by some alternative to regular currency.⁵ These particular means of compelling workers to do the employers' bidding more often than not rely on state support, in which case employers are relieved of the task of invoking them. They apply primarily to unskilled sugarmill workers, over whom control is effected more by threat of sanction than by promise of reward. Finally, control by legitimation refers to efforts made to promote among employees ideological compliance with the assumed authority of the sugarmiller.

The sugarmillers' search for legitimacy in the sphere of relations with employees has to do with consciously establishing authority. Sennett, invoking Gramsci and Weber, has shown succinctly how authority, coercion, and domination are inter-related:

we can always tell when a sense of authority exists in a society: it is when people voluntarily obey their rulers. If they have to be coerced, it is because they don't find the rulers legitimate. Authority...[is]...a belief in legitimacy, measured by voluntary compliance.⁶

4 See for example Scott, "Peruvian Sugar Industry".

5 See S.W.Mintz, "The Folk-Urban Continuum and the Rural Proletarian Community", **American Journal of Sociology** 34:2(1953), pp.136-143, on "the extension of credit to workers for purchases in corporation retail stores". Payment in scrip or coupons was a major grievance of Cuban sugar workers according to F.Grobart, "The Cuban Working Class Movement from 1925 to 1933", **Science and Society** 39:1(1975), pp.73-103. During the 1920s it was observed that sugar workers in Mozambique were paid in **escudos**, which currency had then to be converted at great expense into British sterling to pay hut tax (E.A.Ross, **Report on Employment of Native Labor in Portuguese Africa**. New York: League of Nations, 1925).

6 R.Sennett, **Authority**. New York: Vintage Books, 1981, p.22. The Weberian influence on this statement may be seen by returning to the concept of "imperative control", which is "the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (M.Weber, **The Theory of Social and Economic Organization**. New York: Free Press, 1947, p.152). Authority is then "the legitimate exercise of imperative control" (*ibid.*, p.153), and in "every true relation of imperative control...is a certain minimum of voluntary submission" (*ibid.*, p.324).

Legitimacy in any situation where the means of production are privately owned, is commonly established around property rights in the first instance.⁷ Thereafter, in an industrial context, legitimacy is sought by means of managerial ideologies which relate to the

establishment of management as a separate function, distinct from shop floor workers, with unique expertise and responsibilities, and with major and critical claims to authority over the shop floor upon which the efficiency of the whole enterprise depends...once this conception of management has been accepted by workers, they have in effect, abdicated from any questioning of, or resistance to, many aspects of their domination.⁸

And, to follow this line further,

The importance of notions and levels of legitimacy does not depend upon the achievement of a constantly deferential, acquiescent and obedient workforce. If it did it would clearly be invalid since these conditions have never been met. The importance of these efforts is that they supply, when successful, a moral backdrop against which particular circumstances are argued or are seen to be exceptional.⁹

In sugarmilling, as in any other industry under capitalism, the way in which control and legitimation have been blended, historically, is indicative of an evolutionary process. The three primary problems faced by purchasers of labour - the extraction of work, the rendering of work as a predictable and sustainable force, and the countering of resistance¹⁰ - have been dealt with with decreasing levels of coercion and increasing attempts to establish owners' and managers' authority. This evolution has implied changes in the constitution and role of the cadre of control agents; it has also implied the growth of impersonal control. In the hands of Edwards, this tendency has been treated as a transformation from simple control to structural control in the

⁷ See H.Newby et al **Property, Paternalism and Power**. London: Hutchinson, 1978, Chapters 1 and 8.

⁸ C.R.Littler and G.Salaman, "Bravermania and Beyond: Recent Theories of the Labour Process", **Sociology** 16:2(1982), pp.251-269.

⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁰ J.Storey, **Managerial Prerogative and the Question of Control**. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p.11.

capitalist work-place.¹¹

Simple control refers to the situation, prevalent in nineteenth century industries, where owners and bosses personally intervened in the labour process, hiring and firing labour at their discretion.¹² Structural control, essentially a post-World War II development, encompasses

the formal, consciously contrived controls [which were] embedded in either the physical structure of the labour process (producing "technical" control) or in its social structure (producing "bureaucratic" control).¹³

The growth of the managerial stratum, and the associated linkage of the regimen of work with written rules and specified procedures, constitute an important phase in the development of structural control. Equally important are the forms of sanction which accompanied this development. Edwards has isolated three types of behaviour which are rewarded by bureaucratic control; namely, positive orientation to bureaucratic rules, dependability and predictability, and the internalisation of company goals and values.¹⁴

Although there is some heuristic value in Edwards' distinction between simple and structural control it is difficult to conceive of an industrial setting where one can be said to exist in the complete absence of the other. The distinction between the two forms of control is analytically important, but they are not viewed here as belonging to a continuum.¹⁵

¹¹ R. Edwards, **Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century**. London: Heinemann, 1979.

¹² There is a degree to which simple control represents a euphemism for what Weber referred to as patriarchal control or a variation thereof, namely patrimonial control (Weber, **Social and Economic Organization**, pp.346-347). See also H. Newby, **The Deferential Worker**. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979, p.121.

¹³ Edwards, **Contested Terrain**. p.20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.144-150.

¹⁵ For other criticisms, particularly on Edwards' insensitivity to informal controls such as occupational hierarchy and the technical division of labour see Littler and Salaman, "Bravermania".

Structures of control in the cane sugarmill had their source in the organisational principles of the slave plantation. The fundamental organisational principle in former slave-plantation colonies, was to form slaves, then indentured workers, and then free workers, into gangs. The implications of the technique may be explained by reference to a description of its application in Mauritius early this century. On the first day of the harvesting and crushing season a bell would be rung before dawn, at 3:30 a.m., to waken the wives of labourers so that they could prepare food for their husbands. The men themselves would rise when a second bell sounded at 5 a.m.. Shortly thereafter the roll-call would be taken - "**appel, appel**" - with workers formed into gangs in double rows behind their respective sirdars. The militaristic ritual proceeded with the order being given to "**dressez la ligne**" as the managers arrived on the scene. The factory manager would then select the gangs he wanted for work inside the sugarmill, before the other gangs were chosen for work in the fields and the other departments of the estate. When a third bell tolled at 6 a.m. work commenced, and because it was the first day of the season the general manager would, according to tradition, cut the first stalks of cane. The cutting gangs would watch in silence, and then after applauding the ceremony they would be called to work by their sirdars. At 10 a.m. the wives and daughters of the field workers would bring them their food, and while the men ate, the women would carry cane and load it onto awaiting carts.¹⁶ And so the work would continue uninterrupted until dusk, as it had done since the days of plantation slavery.

The agent of control who was closest to the bulk of the workforce under such a system was the gang-driver; called in this case a sirdar. On the

¹⁶ This description comes from F.North Coombes, *Mes Champs et Mon Moulin*. Port Louis: General Printing and Stationery, 1950, pp.50-52.

slave plantation it would have been a "driver" or "**contramayoral**" who occupied the sirdar's position, and he would in all likelihood have been himself a slave, whose "promotion" was characteristically an affair of great pathos: referring to **contramayorales** in eighteenth century Cuba, Moreno Friginals has written:

these men who managed slaves of their own blood are an especially long-standing tradition. Without trying to penetrate his psychological traumas, we may assert that the black assistant overseer must have been moved by deep ancestral fears. Above all, there was the fear of returning to the slave crew, fear of the overseer and the white master. Whipping others was insurance against being whipped himself, and also of slightly better rations, a little more clothing, and sexual satisfaction with some of the mill's few black women. And of a little more sleep.¹⁷

In the wage-labour agro-industrial complex, the sirdar, like the slave-driver, filled the lowest position in the hierarchy of control agents, and he too received privileges in return for being efficient in his role. By contrast to the slave-driver, the sirdar could avail himself of opportunities related to the receipt of wages by workers under his control in order to increase his own stature and income.¹⁸ This development notwithstanding, the occupational roles of slave-drivers and sirdars were the same, and the relationship between them and overseers remained one that was based on fear.

These aspects of control which originated in the slave plantation were to be maintained in most sugar-producing countries until well into the post-World War II period, if not to the present. They applied to the majority of workers - those deemed unskilled - in the plantation and

¹⁷ M. Moreno Friginals, **The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba**. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976, p.152.

¹⁸ See A. North Coombes, **The Evolution of Sugarcane Culture in Mauritius**. Port Louis: General Printing and Stationery, 1937, p.36, on how sirdars in Mauritius enriched themselves legally by accumulating capitation fees.

industrialised sugarmill alike. By contrast, the transition to industrialised sugarmilling implied major changes in the managerial strata. The plantation had a single manager (possibly the owner) in control of the fields and the sugarmill. The engineer and sugar-boiler had virtually unbridled occupational autonomy, and the only agents of control situated between the manager and the gang drivers were the overseers whose sole "skill" lay in their ability to keep workers working. This structure of managerial and technologists' control was transformed by industrialisation.

The typical pre-World War II agro-industrial complex was headed by a general manager who had overall responsibility for the estates and the sugarmill. Whether or not he was a member of a sugarocratic family it would not have been uncommon for him to have gained experience in the sugarmill and perhaps the plantation too. Taking the case of Java, the career of a general manager would usually have begun in the sugarmill itself, where the incumbent might have been selected for transfer from the sugarmill to the plantation where, after a few years as field overseer he would have been promoted to the position of chief field overseer or sub-manager, before finally taking full control of the entire complex. Before World War I this general manager would have received in addition to his basic salary a commission of 10% of the sugarmill's profits. By the late 1920s this commission had been reduced to between 5 and 8 **per cent** of profits, which nevertheless meant that in a prosperous year his annual salary of £800 to £1000 might have been augmented to as much as £20000. His immediate subordinates, the chief engineer, the chief chemist, and the chief field overseer, were also

paid a commission of 10% of profits, over and above their basic salaries.¹⁹

In the British colonies it was more common to have above the chief engineer and the chief chemist a factory manager who was accountable to the general manager.²⁰ In most instances the chief engineer would have started his working life as an apprentice, and the chief chemist usually had gained some scientific training either before entering the sugarmill or by part-time study while he was employed, perhaps as a laboratory assistant. If the chief chemist had enjoyed a degree of managerial status, it did not imply that he had slipped into this position with ease. Perhaps it was the memory of the assertive independence of the erstwhile sugar masters which made sugarmillers at the turn of the twentieth century wary of introducing chemists in the wake of new processing technology. There was a recurring and not insignificant reason for this apparent laggardliness on the part of late nineteenth- and early twentieth century sugarmillers, who generally acquitted themselves as revolutionary protagonists of technological progress. As the heirs of an industry which had relied for centuries on empirical procedures, they were sceptical of a scientist's presence in the sugarmill. Such scepticism attended the development of chemical control in Mauritius, for example.²¹ The early chemist in Mauritius "*il semblait au profane un être mystérieux venu d'un autre monde, avec des secrets bien gardés et des connaissances hors pair* [he appeared to the outsider/layperson to be a mysterious being from another world, with

19 F.Maxwell, *Economic Aspects of Cane Sugar Production*. London: Norman Rodger, pp.158-159.

20 *Ibid.*, pp.159-160. For additional material on Queensland see A.A.Graves, "Pacific Island Labour in the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906". DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1979, pp.223-226.

21 North Coombes, *Champs et Moulin*. p.22.

well-kept secrets and extraordinary knowledge]".²² This "mysterious being" had a managerial position beside the chief engineer in the pre-World War II sugarmill but without the same status. In any event, the main criteria for promotion to the summit of the occupational hierarchy in the pre-World War II sugarmill were technical knowledge, experience in control, and commitment to company objectives.

The sugarmill's administrators (technical and bureaucratic) and senior technologists (engineers and chief chemists) have been presented as figures of managerial and/or technical authority. Beneath this lofty layer of superordinates extended parallel chains of "command" through personnel in the engineering, processing, and administrative sectors of the sugarmill; with technical skills, bureaucratic skills, or experience being either jointly or severally the main determinants of an individual's conferred authority and occupational status. Such a structure implies a hierarchy, or a combination of hierarchies, which does not allow scope for individual autonomy in the sense of freedom from interference or constant surveillance. In view of this implicit rule of the capitalist labour process, the relative autonomy of the pan-boiler represented a special case.

The pan-boiler represented the last vestige of an artisanal presence in sugar making *per se*, and he clung tenaciously to the autonomy which his skills had earlier won him. In other words, his unique and even anomalous status was not merely ascribed by the technological *status quo*, but had to be vigorously defended against the effects of industrialisation. His defence lay in his ability to rebut the tide of instrumentation and bureaucratic control that attended the advance of sugar technology, and it took on the appearance of a campaign of

²² *Ibid.*, p.23.

secrecy. He was in that sense in a position which was analagous to that of the erstwhile sugar-master. He required no formal education as such to do his job or acquire his "secrets", yet his was very specialised knowledge and his responsibilities in the sugarmill great. Because a good pan-boiler had long experience with empirical rather than scientific techniques, and because he was in charge of the most critical stage in sugar processing, he had in the late nineteenth century been "in a position to dictate to the management".²³ His terrain was not much interfered with in the period before World War II and a cordial relationship of interdependence with managers characterised his status in the sugarmill's occupational hierarchy.

The pan-boiler was recognised as "the true artisan" of the post-eighteen fifties sugarmill, for

All in all, the sugar boiler has a number of very important variables to control, and he does this by manipulating principally the vacuum in the pan and thus the temperature. "Giving the pan a drink", even water in an emergency, also increases his control to some extent. He follows the course of the boiling mass and by the feel of a smear which is withdrawn from the pan in the "proof stick".²⁴

He was a "true artisan" then in that his expertise was empirically grounded, and his sphere of control exclusive. And as an artisan he had autonomy which, as Walter Rodney explained in his history of Guyana, should be viewed as a culmination of struggle "that might otherwise be easily overlooked: namely, the search for dignity and self-fulfillment on the job".²⁵ In the sugarmills of Guyana, wrote Rodney,

²³ N.Deerr, *The History of Sugar*. 2 Vols. London: Chapman & Hall, 1949, p.582.

²⁴ A.van Hook, *Sugar: Its Production, Technology, and Uses*. New York: Ronald Press, 1949, pp.39-41.

²⁵ W.Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. London: Heinemann, 1981, p.161.

The greater the skill, the more predictable it was that a category of labour would accommodate only on terms that went some way toward satisfying their demands. Pan-boilers represented the extreme of this tendency, possessing as they did a store of knowledge denied to the factory overseer. They were the elite of the Creoles within the factory, and factory managers accorded them a grudging respect. The tempering of the cane juice was generally left entirely to the head pan-boiler. In the *Overseers' Manual* [of 1882], the factory overseer was advised to check on the pan-boiler about one hour after granulation - but "let him do it with tact as pan-boilers do not like being interfered with. It is almost needless to say that the tricks and unjustifiable resources of our professional pan-boilers in Demerara are legion." Pan-boilers produced; and that is why they were left alone to respond to the most advanced technology which the sugar industry had to offer.²⁶

Writing in a less prosaical vein, a former Mauritian sugarmill manager had much the same to say of the island's pan-boilers, but with the added observation that with the advent of the cuitometer (a pan control instrument) in the 1940s the pan-boiler's reign over the pan floor was drawing to a close.²⁷

Having spelt out in some detail the background of sirdars and the figures of ultimate managerial and technical authority, and having also drawn out the pan-boiler from his well-guarded niche, the development of structural control in Natal's sugarmills may now be examined both as a process and in terms of the changing composition and roles of those employed primarily as agents of control. This examination follows the transformation of control mechanisms from the days of owner-operative rule during the indentured labour period, to the system of management by professionals.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ North Coombes, *Champs et Moulin*. pp.90-91.

Sugarocratic Owner-Operatives in Natal

Before the advent of centralised sugarmilling, most of the plantation owners were not merely resident owners but also practical sugar producers, personally involved with the working of their lands and sugarmills. This meant that the first sugarocrats (relative latecomers J.L.Hulett and C.G.Smith excepted) gained first-hand experience as artisans or overseers and, simultaneously, they imparted a personal quality to the employer/employee relationship. In effect then, there was little, from recruiting workers to technology and to control, in which the owner-operative did not intercede. In 1861 a typical working day for William Campbell was described by his father in this way:

He is manager, clerk, etc....The first rays of the morning sun find him at the factory, where, after he has set the kaffirs to work and raised the steam for the battery, etc., he returns to the house, has breakfast, and then orders out the remaining kaffirs, 60 to 70 in number, where, standing a few yards in front, he issues his mandates in the kaffir language with volubility and correctness. He names eight, ten or more, as the case may require, to cut wood, so many more to cut cane, so many more to one duty or another, and then with a wave of his hand the place is cleared in an instant. He then goes to the factory where his chief business is to attend to the sugar boiling. By this time I have torn myself from the grasp of Morpheus and I report myself as quickly as possible to the factory, where I start the big engine and commence crushing. Soon after, William's horse, saddled, is brought to him and he rides off and inspects the workmen on various parts of the estate. He returns and arranges the work in and around the factory until night; then he writes up his books.²⁸

By being integral participants in sugarmill work, the early sugarocrats were themselves subjected to the discipline imposed by that work. In the words of William Pearce, in the late 1880s

I had to be manager, sugar boiler, a bit of an engineer and field overseer and having served five years in a wagon-making and blacksmith shop, I was able to do all

²⁸ E.Campbell, *The Life of Sam Campbell*. Durban: Privately published, 1933, p.170.

my own repairs...I also had to keep my own books...You can imagine I had a bit of a lively time and I never got to bed until 10p.m. or 11p.m.. In the crushing season it was necessary to be up again at about 2 or 3a.m..²⁹

And two of Pearce's contemporaries, the brothers Frank and Charles Reynolds, often put in a 21-hour day during the founding years of their empire.³⁰

In these circumstances, control implied more than owners' supervision in the recruitment and dismissal of labour or in the determination of the intensity and duration of work. Sugarmillers were in the position of having to control and produce simultaneously, of having to oversee the work of others and do physical work themselves; and by being seen to be operatives with a working day as long as if not longer than the next worker's, they must always have had that as an example and yardstick against which to compare the work of employees. It was the visible presence and work of sugarocrats then which typified simple control in the sugarmills.

Simple or patriarchal control by owner-operatives had structural aspects which were related to the functioning of the Indian indenture system in Natal. From Mauritius had come much of the inspiration for the Indian indenture system in Natal, and its example was, whether consciously or not, closely followed in putting to work indentured workers.³¹ For indentured Indian workers in Natal the regimen of gang work was similar to if not more harsh than that which prevailed in Mauritius. Typically

²⁹ *Illovo Digest* (May 1966), pp.5-8.

³⁰ *SASJ* 14:10(1930), p.681.

³¹ The conscious reference to Mauritius has been shown by L.M.Thompson, "Indian Immigration into Natal 1860-1872", *Archives Year Book for South African History* 2(1952). Colonial administrators had also looked to British Guiana for guidance on the question of indenturing women as workers (*NLC, Sessional Papers*, 7, 1874), and to Jamaican law for guidance on immigration control (*NLA, Sessional Papers*, 5, 1894).

(and minimally) daily work would be performed from dawn to dusk, with one or sometimes two breaks for meals, and on Saturday afternoons workers would collect their weekly rations.³²

The indenture system proved itself to be extremely malleable in the hands of Natal's sugarmillers. For all the checks (real and ostensible) against abuse, sugarmillers had found it possible to squeeze every conceivable advantage out of the system and its victims. Not least of these efforts were those which revolved around the predictability promised by the indenture system. Sugar production by a largely indentured workforce implied production within set parameters. This advantage of the indenture system, from the sugarmillers' point of view, was clearly spelt out in a remark made by Hawksworth in 1880:

I know of many planters who would not make a single ton of sugar but for the Indians in their employ. As it is, the work progresses from Monday morning to Saturday night, and the planters can always gauge the exact amount of labour that the Coolies can get through in a given period.³³

A detailed exposition of what that work regimen entailed was contained in evidence before a Commission of Inquiry into conditions on F.Reynolds' property. In her summary of the evidence Tayal posited that by their response to the case, other sugarmillers in Natal showed that they probably treated workers no differently from Reynolds.³⁴ Between 1884 and 1907 Reynolds' workers worked a minimum 12-hour day during the off-crop, starting with roll-call by torchlight. During the crushing season, which lasted from July to December or January, work was intensified to the extent that workers were woken at about 1 a.m. to work a 17- or 18-hour day under the supervision of two shifts of

³² On the length of the working day see W.Y.Campbell, **The Natal Sugar Industry**. Durban: P.Davis & Sons, 1885, p.48; and **NLC, Sessional Papers**, 6, 1876.

³³ **NLA Debates**, Vol.1, 474-480, 28.1.1880.

³⁴ M.Tayal, "Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911", **Indian Economic and Social History Review** 14:4(1977), pp.519-547.

overseers.

Sirdars in Natal executed their duties in much the same manner as their counterparts elsewhere. Their proclivity to the use of threats and violence against labourers placed in their charge was widespread. Sirdars' coercion frequently met with resistance from workers and, probably far less frequently, with magisterial approbrium and convictions. During 1909 the Protector of Immigrants noted a growing reluctance amongst employers to keep sirdars (or white overseers) in their pay if they had assaulted a worker, and that employers were generally "less inclined to screen them than in years gone by".³⁵ What this meant in quantitative terms is unclear. By contrast to the greater numbers of the past, there were only of the order of 8 to 10 annual convictions of sirdars during the early nineteen hundreds.³⁶ Neither the figures nor the observed trend may be regarded as telling much about the true extent of assault by sirdars. If account is taken of the constraints placed on workers who wished to lay charges of assault before a magistrate, most notably the need for a pass to do so; if consideration is given to the claim that there was complicity between colonial magistrates and sugar interests;³⁷ if there was "screening" of guilty sirdars by owners; and if consideration is given to the large discrepancy between prosecutions and convictions for assault, then it is difficult to imagine that official colonial data conveyed an accurate picture of sirdars' (or overseers') precise means of control.

That sirdars were entrusted with controlling the work of gangs and disciplining them too, meant also that it was mainly upon their word that employers gauged the worth of individual workers. The relative

³⁵ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1909.

³⁶ Ibid., Annual Reports, 1900 - 1910.

³⁷ See Thompson, "Indian Immigration".

anonymity of the gang worker in the employer's eyes; the fact that physical strength or dexterity were the criteria by which workers were assigned to particular gangs; and the sirdar's conferred authority, were in combination the factors which determined whether a worker stayed in the fields or was assigned to the sugarmill. The role of the sirdar and the arbitrariness of this state of affairs were in themselves structural controls which functioned within the context of simple control.

Sirdars represented the continuity of organisational principles which had been born of the plantation system. But if the sirdar's role was preserved, his relationship with the sugarocratic owner-operative became increasingly impersonal as the owner's role as operative changed. Expansion and centralisation demanded a diverse complex of technical expertise as much as they did capital. Within four or five decades of the beginning of Natal's sugar history it was no longer possible for a sugarmill owner to command ubiquitous authority as employer and operative at once; a factor which did not prevent him from maintaining a specialised interest in a particular facet of production. Whereas most early sugarocrats in Natal were immersed in sugarmilling as owner-operatives, it went beyond the ability of individual sugarocrats indefinitely to exercise personal surveillance over sugarmill employees, let alone become proficient with their every task. With the passage of time, a combination of expanded capital in sugarmilling, technological change, and a growing complexity in the sugarmill's division of labour, necessitated the delegation of sugarocratic authority in an ever more complex manner. As the sugarocracy's powers of surveillance became increasingly reliant on an expanding network of control over employees, machines, and processes, other changes, primarily in the technical sphere, brought into existence impersonal mechanisms of control.

Instead of seeing in these changes a straight-forward sequence of delegation, and the growing remoteness of sugarocrats from control at the point of production, the corresponding changes in levels of various employees' authority and autonomy need also to be considered for their reverberating effect on the control process. In this way the full spectrum of control devices operative within the sugarmills, whether within or beyond the purview of individual sugarocrats, may be exposed, as may the structural impediments to sugarocratic and managerial control over sugarmill work.

Managing Directors, General Managers, and Factory Managers

The stratum of individuals closest to the sugarocracy when its respective empires expanded, and immediately responsible for the exercise of sugarocratic control, were those managing directors and general managers who did not belong to the sugarocracy as such. These individuals to whom sugarocratic authority was extended held wide powers which enabled each to make a personal impression on some facet of sugarmilling history. Although certain of them attained their positions after a series of promotions within the sugarmills, they came more frequently from outside the sphere of sugarmill work, sometimes beginning as company secretaries. In any event they were a small group of sugarocratic lieutenants, for there were at any one time few positions of general manager and managing director, and these were often occupied by members of the sugarocracy. The role played by the Mauritian A.Boulle as Tongaat's general manager in the 1910s and 20s reached virtually legendary proportions.³⁸ A contemporary of Boulle's was A.Warner, who was born in Scotland in 1866. After working as a

³⁸ See R.G.T.Watson, *Tongaati: An African Experiment*. London: Hutchinson, 1960, *passim*.

young man as a sugar estate manager in Trinidad, he spent some years cattle ranching in Venezuela, and then in 1904 came to Natal to join the staff of the Tinley Manor sugarmill, of which he soon became manager. In 1908 he was appointed manager of the new Amatikulu sugarmill, and in 1920 he became general manager of Hulett's Zululand operations. Seven years before his death in 1948 he was made alternate for Sir L.Lyle on the Hulett's board of directors.³⁹

A younger incumbent of the sort of position occupied by Boulle and Warner was R.H.Waring, who came to South Africa in 1901, five years after his birth in Lancashire. He joined Crookes Bros. at Renishaw in 1921, and was later transferred to C.G.Smith & Co.. After a spell as secretary of Illovo Sugar Estates, in association with S.F. and V.Crookes, he was returned to C.G.Smith in 1935. In 1938 he became administrative manager of Reynolds Bros.' estates, and in 1952 he rose to the position of general manager of Pongola sugarmill.⁴⁰

By contrast to the above three individuals, H.W.Shuker was appointed as Hulett's Zululand general manager in 1954 after a 35-year career as artisan and engineer in Natal sugarmills. Born in Sheffield in 1894, he was apprenticed as a fitter in the Darnall sugarmill in 1919. After promotion to second engineer of Amatikulu sugarmill, he was in 1929 made manager of Emoyeni sugarmill, "the training ground of many of Huletts' leading engineers". There followed appointments as chief engineer and then as manager of Amatikulu and, two years before becoming a general manager, as manager of Felixton sugarmill.⁴¹

Although being a factory manager was not a pre-requisite, it was

³⁹ SASJ 32:10(1948), p.635.

⁴⁰ SASJ 41:11(1957), p.919.

⁴¹ SASJ 52:2(1968), p.135.

unlikely that any other sugarmill-based person would be appointed to the position of general manager. Factory managers in Natal were until World War II invariably engineers. These engineers were usually immigrants from either Mauritius or Scotland; Scottish engineers being highly regarded, as was the milling plant that was imported from Scotland. Most of the north coast sugarmills were at some time administered by Mauritians, as were some of the south coast sugarmills. This characteristic feature reflected the general links between the sugar industries of Mauritius and Natal, and also the more particular and personal contacts between owners and managerial personnel in the two regions. There were strong connections between the early Saunders' and Mauritius, and J.L.Hulett personally recruited a Mauritian manager who had first come to Tinley Manor as a consultant in 1903, and who subsequently worked for Hulett and his company for some forty years.⁴² This latter manager, E.Boulle (not directly related to Tongaat's A.Boulle), was one of the Mauritian settlers in Natal who was visited in 1915 by F.North Coombes, a compatriot of some standing amongst managers in Mauritius; the visitor was also received by some of Natal's sugarocrats; he was made three offers of work in the Natal sugar industry; and he was disappointed when his proposal to fill the vacancies of factory manager and chief chemist at Mount Edgecombe was refused on the grounds that his salary would exceed that of the chief engineer.⁴³ The importance of personal contacts amongst managers in Natal and Mauritius, and between them and the local sugarocracy, is illustrated by this episode; it also conveys an idea of how exclusive the engineer/manager stratum was within the pre-World War II sugarmills.

⁴² "Darnall Area Annals", Womens' Institute, no date.

⁴³ North Coombes, *Champs et Moulin*. pp.306-307.

Technologists' Authority and Pan-Boilers' Autonomy

The sequence of promotions whereby senior technical personnel in Natal achieved their status before World War II was similar in the engineering and process departments. Following an apprenticeship and service as an artisan and journeyman, a fitter and turner might then have been selected for promotion to the position of foreman or shift engineer, then to second engineer awaiting a vacancy for a chief engineer. To climb beyond the position of foreman or shift engineer was the most important step, and by the mid-1930s it was already considered improbable that an "average fitter without technical training or administrative ability" could ever become a chief engineer.⁴⁴ An anecdotal reference to the stature of the chief engineer bears repetition: it has been recalled that before World War II, at Mount Edgecombe,

lined up on the verandah outside the offices, squatting in their isabella coloured rags, were ten or a dozen little **chokras** - small Indian boys. These were runners, and the moment anyone in the offices yelled "Boy!", the first in line would spring into action and dash off on the message. But Fred [the chief engineer] had his own special runner who always followed him round the factory wherever he went, carrying a great big enamel teapot and a cup, and who never answered except to Fred's call.⁴⁵

Technological change and industrial legislation during the late 1930s and early 1940s necessitated a division of his labour. As the president of SASTA put it,

I am glad to notice that many companies have appointed assistant certificated engineers to take over the routine duties. This will allow the chief engineer to give more study to developing his plant for their arduous work, attending to Government requirements concerning labour and machinery and devising means to

⁴⁴ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 10(1936).

⁴⁵ *Condenser* 5:5(1967), pp.6-7.

overcome the rising costs caused through shorter day legislation and through plants running to full capacity.⁴⁶

The function of senior engineers had thus grown to embrace bureaucratic work in addition to responsibilities of a purely technical nature, and it had stronger control connotations than that of senior chemists.

The other route to seniority was that which began for cane-testers and bench chemists when they were placed in the sugarmill as process operators or supervisors. Thereafter they might have been promoted to factory overseer, in which case they fell in line for promotion to assistant chemist and ultimately chief chemist. However chief chemists were not faced with the same prospects as chief engineers for eventual promotion to top management, and the factory manager of a pre-World War II sugarmill was typically a former chief engineer.

In most sugar producing countries chemists had not been favourably looked upon by owners and engineers alike until as recently as World War I, and in Natal for some time thereafter.⁴⁷ Like their counterparts abroad, sugarmill owners in Natal had very limited knowledge of theoretical and analytical chemistry before World War I, and they displayed a scepticism of chemical control. Prejudice and jealousy moved them and their managers - engineers with many years of "on-the-job" experience- to be outspoken about their reluctance to introduce chemical control. Although the technically advanced Mount Edgecombe sugarmill had appointed its first chemist, a Mauritian, in 1908,⁴⁸ the prejudice of Natal sugarmillers was still in 1918 found to be

⁴⁶ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 14(1941).

⁴⁷ The "rift" that existed between engineers and chemists in Natal was noted in an article on "The Status of the Sugar Factory Chemist" in *SASJ* 6:3(1922), pp.193-197.

⁴⁸ *SASJ* 60:10(1976), p.785.

commonplace.⁴⁹ Indeed, C.G.Smith himself conceded that

I am one of the people who used to say "I don't think these Chemists know anything about it at all." But I have come to the conclusion that I was the fool there... I have visited several of the sugar countries, and made a little money out of the East Coast. We had a very fine factory there that had no chemical control whatever, but directly we imposed chemical control there we made a lot of money.⁵⁰

It goes without saying that the absence of chemical control during the first two decades of the twentieth century reflected the absence of chemists. Change from this state of affairs and in the direction of chemical control was erratic, as Osborn outlined in a draft chapter of "Sweet Concord". Osborn's notes, which were based largely on a paper published in the SASJ during 1937, traced the origins of chemical control in Natal back to 1887, when a chemist from Jamaica was taken on at the Blackburn sugarmill and

his request that a laboratory be built for him were looked upon with mild amusement. But he was asked to go ahead, and soon found himself in trouble with the panboiler, who was suspicious, and quite unfriendly. The panboiler had proved himself, the newcomer had not. The upshot was inevitable. For the next eighteen years until the mill closed down, [his] instruments and apparatus lay idle.⁵¹

Although there were chemists employed during the early 1900s, and W.Campbell had tried in 1913, and W.E.R.Edwards in 1915, to introduce chemical control across the industry,

The time was not ripe. There was too much prejudice against modern methods, too much reserve, and a great lack of co-operative spirit.⁵²

And in 1922 the growers' protagonist, Heaton Nicholls, pondered

what Mr Saunders would have said if I had gone to him some years ago and asked him for figures. It is only recently that one mill would disclose its figures to

⁴⁹ SASJ 1:10(1918), p.733.

⁵⁰ "Opening Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 8(1934).

⁵¹ R.F.Osborn, "Sweet Concord", p.364.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.365.

another mill...There is not a single chemical result published in the Sugar Journal in all its existence relating to a South African Mill.⁵³

After the signing of the Fahey Agreement in 1926, and against the background of a deteriorating world sugar market, there was an "unusual expansion of chemical control",⁵⁴ as well as a growth in the number of sugarmills which reported their performances for comparative purposes (see Table 12).

TABLE 12: SUGARMILLS REPORTING ON CHEMICAL CONTROL, 1925-1931

	SUGARMILLS IN OPERATION	SUGARMILLS REPORTING
1925/26	25	11
1926/27	23	13
1927/28	21	14
1928/29	25	14
1929/30	25	16
1930/31	23	17

Source: *Proceedings, South African Sugar Technologists' Association* 4 (1930) and 6 (1932).

Engineers remained cautious about chemists throughout the 1920s, and it was only in the 1930s that their jealousy was noticed to have given way

⁵³ TAD, K 39, Vol.3, Heaton Nicholls to Sugar Commission, 20.4.1922.

⁵⁴ "Report of Committee on Training of Sugar House Apprentices", *Proceedings, SASTA* 4(1930), pp.108-110.

to co-operation.⁵⁵ Interestingly, C.G.Smith expressed the view in 1934 that

I should like to see the Technologists [engineers and chemists] get much closer in touch with each other...but I do not know how much the despots, that is the Managing Directors, are going to stop this development.⁵⁶

This opinion on the amount of autonomy enjoyed by technologists may well have been shared by the SASTA president who remarked later in the 1930s that "In many instances, the Sugar Factory Engineer and Chemist have to deal with and take orders from individuals and groups of men who are non-technical".⁵⁷

Chemists had on their part shown concern for their status. Having thrown their weight behind SASTA in its formation in 1926, and at its annual congresses thereafter, chemists' expressed their felt need for collective organisation and made calls also for the registration of chemists and control over their qualifications.⁵⁸ They did not ever create an autonomous body, but in SASTA they were able to establish closer rapport with engineers. By providing a forum, independent of owners and their companies, within which the findings of engineering, chemical, and agricultural research could be aired, SASTA embodied the sense of mutual occupational interests amongst its members. Upon the initiative of its members, the practice of annually analysing data from collaborating sugarmills was done under SASTA auspices. SASTA also promoted formal contact with overseas technologists by calling on SASA to send delegates to congresses of the International Society of Sugar Technologists.⁵⁹ It was in this manner that engineers and chemists spontaneously (as for example Herisson of Verulam's Central Factory did

⁵⁵ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 10(1936).

⁵⁶ "Opening Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 8(1934).

⁵⁷ "President's Address", *Proceedings, SASTA* 11(1937).

⁵⁸ See *Proceedings, SASTA* 3(1929).

⁵⁹ See *Proceedings, SASTA* 5(1931).

by inventing a water-cooled crystalliser in the late 1920s)⁶⁰ provided the research infrastructure for the Natal sugarmills until 1949, when the SMRI was established by sugarmillers with the co-operation of the state. However, despite the supportive role played by SASTA, chemists had generally still not altogether achieved parity with engineers by World War II.

Although some chief chemists had been eligible before World War II for promotion to the position of factory manager, their payment was, by contrast to that of factory managers and chief engineers never deliberately kept secret. This privatised relationship between owners, factory managers and engineers was something which lent emphasis to their relative authority. How that authority was exercised may have depended upon the level of personal involvement of sugarocrats in the running of their sugarmills, but because it was based on technical acumen, engineers and factory managers were endowed with claims to a particular type of authority, quite distinct from that of non-technical superordinates.

Apart from technical expertise, factory managers and engineers had to be seen to have the ability to wield that authority over designated subordinates. On this issue it is illuminating to pursue the observation that the destination of émigré Mauritian managers was not confined solely to Natal, and that their presence in the sugarmills of Moçambique since the early 1900s was suggestive of noteworthy similarities in employer practices in the two colonies. In Moçambique the largest sugarmilling venture had mainly Scottish engineers, as well as Mauritian managers, chemists, and operatives. Two of Moçambique's sugarmills were for some time owned by Natal sugarmillers, and in the

⁶⁰ SASJ 13:5(1929), p.275.

case of C.G.Smith's sugarmill on the Buzi river, "skilled white men were placed in the key positions, assisted by educated Mauritians, Demeraras and Blantyre boys [*sic*]"⁶¹ That Mauritian managers in particular could be so readily accommodated during the early stages of sugarmilling in both Natal and Moçambique, showed that they were equally at home in two foreign regions with structurally different but comparably coercive labour systems. In other words, Mauritius had proved itself in the period before World War II to be a perfect seed-bed for sugarmill managers in a labour coercive context: Mauritius was a relatively advanced sugar producing country capable of yielding experienced men, and it displayed all the trappings of colonialism which contributed to a managerial consciousness within which any questioning of the *status quo* could not be countenanced. In Mauritius managers were accustomed to being addressed by workers as *bourzois* (bourgeois), and in Natal (or Moçambique) they were unlikely to tolerate anything short of complete servility from workers, many of whom had first-hand acquaintance with Mauritian managerialism.

Amongst those who were best acquainted with Mauritian managers in Natal's sugarmills were those pan-boilers who came from Mauritius. Many of the early pan-boilers were attracted from Mauritius, where vacuum pans had been in use for some thirty years before being installed in Natal, and by the turn of the twentieth century they dominated by numbers (see Figure 20) and by reputation in the specialised sphere of pan-boiling. Although the practice of employing Indian pan-boilers originated contemporaneously with the employment of the first Mauritian pan-boilers, it was on a very much smaller scale. Freed by then from their indentures, these Indian pan-boilers were considerably better

⁶¹ R.F.Osborn, *C.G.: A Great Natalian: A Biography of Sir Charles George Smith*. Durban: C.G.Smith, 1966, p.42.

FIGURE 20: PAN-BOILERS IN NATAL, 1880-1905

	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905
	aA Cato Manor bB Cornubia cC La Mercy	cC La Mercy dD Phoenix eE Little Umhlanga fF Prospect Hall gG Blackburn hH Umzinto	eE Umgeni fF Avoca (F: Baker) iI Prospect Hill jJ Umzinto	uU Esperanza vV Mt Edgecombe wW Mt Edgecombe xX Tongaat fF Avoca iI Blackburn jJ Balmaine kK Umzinto (K: Blacksmith) lL Verulam mM Bridgeford nN Prospect Hall oO Umgeni pP Ottawa (P: Carpenter) qQ Umzinto rR Avoca sS Mt Edgecombe tT Mt Edgecombe	vV Mt Edgecombe wW Mt Edgecombe yY Esperanza zZ Tongaat aA Ottawa iI Tongaat jJ Esperanza kI La Mercy kK Umzinto (K: Blacksmith) mL Effingham oO Umgeni pP Ottawa (P: Carpenter)	vV Mt Edgecombe yY Esperanza aA Ottawa bBB Esperanza (BB: Baker) cCC Esperanza dDD Umhloti Valley (DD: Engineer) eEE Verulam fFF Tinley Manor gGG Tinley Manor hGG Tinley Manor kI La Mercy kK Umzinto (K: Blacksmith) mL Effingham oO Umgeni pP Ottawa (P: Carpenter)
Proportion of Total Who by Name were Mauritian	2:3	13:13	15:16	13:14	14:14	13:14

Notes: Each name in brackets is the same as that immediately above it, and of the same address.

Capital letters designate a particular surname. Given the source of information, it follows that the figure is exclusive of any disenfranchised pan-boilers who may have been practising.

Source: Voters' Rolls for Alexander and Victoria Counties (Government Gazettes).

remunerated than other free Indian workers, but far less so than the Mauritian pan-boilers who became by tradition the masters of the pan floor in Natal.

The number of émigré Mauritian pan-boilers (many of whom were regarded as "creoles") grew until about the turn of the twentieth century, after which time their expertise could be depended upon for the training of successors. That there have been Indians and non-Mauritian whites amongst these successors stresses the anomalous nature of the pan-boiler's position in the South African context. These latter pan-boilers, the non-Mauritians, were to be found primarily in the sugarmills of the south coast but also in the smaller sugarmills of the north coast. In one particularly interesting case a white apprentice pan-boiler was taught in the 1930s by two Indian artisans, one of whose sons subsequently served his apprenticeship under the white pan-boiler.⁶²

Although the training of pan-boilers was for all intents and purposes undertaken as an apprenticeship, trainees were not accommodated when in 1948 the Apprenticeship Committee for the Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Industry was formed by the Department of Labour. They were treated instead in the same way as learner factory overseers or bench chemists, who became qualified after a specified period of experience as assistant to a person already deemed qualified. For a learner pan-boiler this meant a three-year spell as assistant to a qualified pan-boiler, at a higher rate of pay than either learner overseers and bench chemists, both of whom served for five years as learners, or apprenticed artisans, who fell under statutory regulations. These pay differentials reflected the ambiguity of the pan-boiler's position of

⁶² *Illovo Digest* (April 1971), p.8.

dependence/independence. Like overseers and bench chemists, their knowledge had little relevance outside the sugarmill; their vulnerability, which stemmed from such relative dependence, was countered by their self-conscious independence and resourcefulness.

A survey reported in 1943 showed that pan control instruments were not then in general use in Natal,⁶³ and until the late 1940s the pan-boilers of Natal still worked within an aura of artisanal "secrecy".⁶⁴ In 1947 the Board of Trade and Industries reported that "The greatest divergence of method between mills was noted in pan boiling. This process is still regarded as a somewhat mysterious art and every pan boiler makes use of his own particular methods".⁶⁵ Whereas formerly crystals of consistent size and quality could only be obtained under an expert pan-boiler's tight control, the cuitometer, in the words of a Natal sugar technologist, "enabled one who had no previous experience, to boil a pan of sugar as easily as they could".⁶⁶ This was perhaps an overstatement of the situation, but pan-boilers must have made a similar assessment of the cuitometer's potential, as they did not welcome its arrival with open arms. Indeed, they were regarded by technologists to resent any manner of interference, let alone when it threatened to lay bare their secrets.

In 1951 some technologists had forecast that extensive experience with the cuitometer would lead the way to automatic pan control,⁶⁷ and there

⁶³ R.M.Bechar'd, "Survey of Pan Boiling Practice in the South African Sugar Industry", *Proceedings, SASTA* 17(1943), pp.36-40.

⁶⁴ A.E.Rabe, "Some Experiences with Conductivity Control of Pan Boiling", *Proceedings, SASTA* 25(1951), pp.52-56.

⁶⁵ Board of Trade and Industries, Report No 298, *The South African Sugar Industry*, 1947.

⁶⁶ Rabe, "Conductivity Control".

⁶⁷ See discussion of Rabe, "Conductivity Control" in *Proceedings, SASTA* 25(1951).

was little doubt that with the appearance of the instrument, the death knell had been sounded for the "finger and thumb" method by which the pan-boiler decided when to "seed" (or "grain") the syrup in the vacuum pan, and when to stop crystal growth and "strike" the pan.⁶⁸ However, experimentation throughout the 1950s was indicative of the technical problems that complemented pan-boilers' prejudice to prevent the rapid instrumentation of pan-boiling.⁶⁹ Thus persisted the "finger and thumb" method in many Natal sugarmills: few innovations were so slowly diffused through the Natal sugarmills during the twentieth century as pan instrumentation.

Despite the threatened erosion of artisanal pan-boiling skills during the 1950s, the old pan-boilers still retained considerable autonomy.⁷⁰ Although their own jobs were not jeopardised and their knowledge remained viable and necessary, artisanal pan-boilers were witnesses to the process that destined their skills for redundancy.

At a more general level the instrumentation of pan control had two major ramifications: on the one hand it meant that artisans would be replaced by schooled but unskilled operators, and on the other hand, as a technologist noted in 1954, "A corollary to the elimination of the pan boiler's judgement in graining, is that the responsibility for the final crystal size moves from the pan boiler to the Factory Manager".⁷¹ Both of these developments, which proceeded through the 1960s, reflected the extension of bureaucratic control to the pan floor. The final stage in

⁶⁸ C.L.Steyn, "Molasses Graining and the Magma System under Natal Conditions", *Proceedings, SASTA* 28(1954), pp.117-119.

⁶⁹ See the article by pan-boiler A.F.Ducasse, "An Aid to Pan Boiling", *Proceedings, SASTA* 28(1954), pp.115-116.

⁷⁰ This was emphasised in the case of a retired pan-boiler who was specially contracted to lend his wisdom on a Natal pan floor during two troublesome seasons in the 1980s.

⁷¹ E.Beasley, "Some Notes on 'True' Seeding of Vacuum Pans", *Proceedings, SASTA* 28(1954), pp.111-114.

the break-down of artisanal autonomy on the pan floor would come with full automation.

The pan-boiler, it has been argued, personified the final strain of artisanal production in the industrialised sugarmill, yet his origins could be traced to the period of transition from plantation to industrialised sugarmilling. His **raison d'etre** was the un-instrumented vacuum pan, an artefact of scientific application which still had to have severed from it its human component. Until the threshold of instrumentation was crossed, the pan-boiler was afforded relative privilege, particularly if he fully appreciated the value of his "secret" resources.

The Development of Structural Control

Each of the various agents discussed above had their positions within the technical division of labour and their status within the occupational hierarchy altered as structural (bureaucratic and technical) control developed within the sugarmill. The course of that development is now sketched; the first issue to be considered being the bureaucratisation of formal and direct control over sugarmill workers.

As has already been indicated, the agent most immediately responsible for the control of workers at the point of production has historically been the sirdar - the earliest personification of structural control in the sugarmill, and whose authority has remained a fundamental component of relationships within the racially divided sugarmill workforce. A special characteristic of the sirdar in Natal is that he has shared his occupational status with the induna. The sirdar and the induna have

performed identical functions, but usually with respect to Indian and African workers respectively (and thus frequently in specific departments of work). Although language considerations did not define their mutual role, sirdars and indunas have been appointed primarily according to the ability to interpret commands and supervise their execution. The essential difference then between them has been an issue of ascribed ethnicity. The nomenclature itself lays stress on the issue of ethnic differentiation, in the sense that the term induna was adopted from the Nguni denotation for various strata of state functionaries, including military officers, and it has been a title traditionally and in the sugar industry conferred from above.

Though sirdars and indunas are symbols of a racial system of control, they are themselves subject to that system. This system was in the pre-World War II period an "organic" part of the larger system of the racial division of labour, in that it had no person specifically assigned to regulate it. Despite legislation to the effect that employers of over fifty black workers should employ a compound manager,⁷² and despite suggestions that were made by government officials in the early 1920s, to the effect that compound managers should be employed by sugarmillers more or less as welfare officers over black workers,⁷³ few compound managers were to be found in the pre-World War II sugar villages.⁷⁴ When, after the War, the employment of compound managers became the rule rather than the exception, these men were given authority over compound

⁷² Act No 15 of 1911 ("Native Labour Recruiting Act").

⁷³ See TAD, GNLB 308, Notes of Meeting, 26.11.1919.

⁷⁴ This fact was made evident when the information upon which Table 4 is based was collected. An exception, J.R.Saunders, had during 1910 announced that as a large employer he was "forced to keep a European compounder" (NLA Debates, Vol.49, 417-424, 12.1.1910). The powers vested in the compound manager could be abused, as was found when Gledhow's compound manager was convicted in 1936 for a number of thefts and for accepting payment from workers in return for positions in the sugarmill (SASJ 10:9(1936), p.553).

inmates. They took charge of the nutrition, discipline, and often the recruitment and dismissal of African sugarmill workers. In this sense, the racial system of control was more formally institutionalised.

The compound manager symbolised the bridge between simple control and bureaucratic control. When personnel management was generally established by the sugar companies as a headquarters function during the 1960s, the compound manager could have been regarded as the final link in that particular chain of control. His own functions were re-defined in accordance with the re-naming of compound managers as labour managers in the wake of the expansion of personnel management, and he was until the very end of the sugarocratic era generally the only agent of that branch of management who was based in a sugar village. It was usually he who was placed in command of the village police force, which also became highly regimented during the 1960s. Uniforms and ranks were given to these policemen;⁷⁵ they were subjected to militaristic discipline;⁷⁶ and they were paraded before employees on occasions such as when long-service awards were made.⁷⁷

Structural control in the sense of technical control and the "inversion" of the worker/machine relationship, can be said to have had its origins in South African sugarmills during the 1960s. There have historically been only two skills to speak of which were exclusive to the sugarmill, namely those of the erstwhile sugarmasters and those of the pan-boiler. It has been shown how sugarmasters were dispensed with before sugarmilling commenced in Natal, while the pan-boilers' skills have only in the last two decades come under meaningful assault. The factors which have undermined pan-boiling skills have also produced a situation

⁷⁵ See Figure 12.

⁷⁶ See for example *Smithlink* 2:6(1980), p.12.

⁷⁷ See *Condenser* *passim*.

where growing numbers of sugarmill workers have their work-days regulated by the performance of the automated machinery under their constant gaze. With the exception of events on the pan floor, the altered relationship between workers and machines has implied the transformation of semi-skilled work. Manual operatives have been replaced by "operators" who are adequately schooled to be able to respond to the controls of automated plant. Change at the level of sugarmill management was seen in the general post-1960s trend of process managers being appointed above chief chemists, or replacing them, and in the possibilities that developed for promotion from process management to factory management - the chief engineer was no longer implicitly the heir apparent to factory management.

The development of structural control in the above sense meant more than the expansion of bureaucracy and transformations in the personnel structures of labour control and technical control.⁷⁸ In addition to, and complementary to, these changes there emerged extra-work institutions, on the one hand, and organisational means of conducting capital/labour relations on the other hand (both of which are more fully analysed in Chapters 7 and 8). The former institutions were related to the employers' quest for stable work relations through identification with the sugar companies, and the latter had to do with the management of employees' material demands. Employees' identification with the sugar companies was sought through such devices as long-service awards and company journals, and through the community-building programmes which are discussed in the next chapter; the articulation of a "company philosophy" was another means to this end. The much-publicised "Tongaat

⁷⁸ SASA's Personnel Consultant, T. Vogel (Interviewed, Durban, 11.9.1985), would argue that one of the most progressive steps taken by the sugarocracy was the appointment of professionals, such as Vogel himself, in the early 1960s.

philosophy" was formulated along the lines of

a philosophy of food, family life, and freedom from fear for all, regardless of race, colour or creed, welded together with a sense of pride and belonging. We [the Tongaat Sugar Company] have gone to extreme lengths to create in the mind of the individual what is good and what is best...

...Our problem is one of multi-nationalism and it is only through partnership that we can attain progress, and progress is prosperity and we believe that prosperity is contagious.⁷⁹

In 1980 the "Tongaat philosophy" was expanded to indicate the company's support for

free collective bargaining...[negotiations with] registered trade unions...[which would] best be served by the development of multiracial industry unions.⁸⁰

These were all essentially one-way processes, conceived of and projected by sugarmillers. By contrast, the management of employees' material demands involved dialogue and conflict.

Until the first Wage Determination was made in 1942 (and the subsequent establishment of the Industrial Council for the Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Industry in 1947), wages and other expenditures on labour were determined unilaterally by sugarmillers. Although the 1942 Wage Determination involved dialogue it did not embody negotiations as such; the registration of the Industrial Council had to be awaited before a modicum of negotiation was possible.

The first Industrial Council wage agreements were concluded between employers, on the one hand, and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU)(large artisan union), the Sugar Industry Employees' Association (SIEA)(small white union),⁸¹ and the NSIEU (Indian "parallel" union) on

⁷⁹ SASJ 52:7(1968), pp.589-593.

⁸⁰ Nkosibomvu 20(1980), p.1.

⁸¹ See I.L.Walker and B.Weinbren, 2000 Casualties - A History of the Trade Unions and the Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa. Johannesburg: South African Trade Union Council, 1961, p.377.

the other hand. From 1949 to 1971, inclusive, wage schedules were separately drawn up for skilled workers, and for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. In the case of skilled workers' wages, workers' representation on the Industrial Council was made through the AEU, the SIEA, and, since 1961, the South African Electrical Workers' Association; the NSIEU was the sole union involved with semi-skilled and unskilled workers' wage negotiations. The 1974 determination reflected the re-integration of the two sectors of the Industrial Council, which was enlarged when the 1979 and 1981 determinations were made, by the inclusion of the South African Boilermakers', Iron and Steel Workers', Shipbuilders' and Welders' Society, and the National Union of Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Employees (NUSMRE)(African), respectively.

While the creation of the Industrial Council represented a further step towards greater bureaucratic control over workers, it also stood as a form of control over sugarmillers. Having called the tune until 1942, sugarmillers were not prepared to allow their role in the wage determination process be subordinated to an institutional structure which they did not ultimately control. In the early years of the Industrial Council's existence, it is shown in Chapter 8, employers had played an obstructionist role by trying to hamper the organisational work of the NSIEU. Although coercion in this context seems to have been strongest in the 1940s and early 1950s, employers did not remove themselves from the sphere of workers' organisation. In the 1960s they were said in at least one instance to be involved in union affairs,⁸² and after 1973 they collectively gave considerable attention to the formation and functioning of the works and liaison committees which they portrayed as democratic organs for black workers' representation. Such

⁸² P.L.van den Berghe, *Caneville: The Social Structure of a South African Town*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964, p.97.

was the background to the "within the family" ideology which has been sustained by employers since the early-1970s.

The employers' campaign to keep wage negotiations strictly "within the family" developed from about the time that it was conceded by a sugarmiller, in 1971, that "the wage scales at best have been a matter of tradition. Anomalies were therefore the rule".⁸³ Later that year C.J.Saunders had argued that "employers should cease viewing workers in racial groups, and to start thinking of them as men, co-workers and fellow citizens".⁸⁴ Employers were spurred on in the direction suggested by these pronouncements after the relevant legislation was provided in 1973 to create works and liaison committees at each sugarmill - in the case of Tongaat this meant the re-designation of the Non-European Advisory Committee which the company had established in 1962.⁸⁵ Then in April 1976, when African representatives were for the first time admitted to the Industrial Council, this representation was made by 6 delegates elected from a joint committee of the existing works and liaison committees. These latter committees were made up of workers selected under employers' control, and in the case of Tongaat, the employers provided their liaison committee with training at Hilton.⁸⁶ It could not under these circumstances have been unexpected when a particular works committee's chairman declared in 1976 that

to-day, we have a very fine worker/management relationship. This means that we have achieved a good understanding with management of our mutual problems and aspirations. With this in mind we would not like to see trade unions come onto the scene.⁸⁷

Though he might have been dissatisfied when the NUSMRE was founded in

⁸³ "President's Address", **Proceedings, SASTA** 45(1971).

⁸⁴ **SASJ** 55:9(1971), p.493.

⁸⁵ **Condenser** (1976), pp.50-51.

⁸⁶ **Ibid.**

⁸⁷ **Condenser** (1976), pp.3-7.

1980, the Union was launched with the backing of employers.

According to the proponents of the "within the family" ideology, all dealings and negotiations between employers and sugarmill workers should be amicably conducted without interference from "outside". As one senior industrial relations manager in the industry put it,

Do you not think that, provided our sugar workers are given the basic rights of organisation, negotiation and - where necessary - even to strike, that it would be better to meet with employers in the industry themselves, rather than through some nationally organised trade union which might represent a wide spread of industrial interests.⁸⁸

This view took for granted the membership of white sugarmill workers in such unions, and that employers themselves had "a wide spread of industrial interests" (or for that matter that sugarmillers were said in 1960 to have colluded in a "gentleman's agreement" to keep wages to the minima laid down by the Industrial Council).⁸⁹ The ideology is founded upon the employers' definition of who constitutes the paterfamilias and who the kindred. When the NUSMRE went to court during 1982 and won its case against C.G.Smith to have loading in cane trans-shipment zones classified as industrial work, employers had contested the issue on the grounds, *inter alia*, that the sphere of Industrial Council agreements ended at the factory fence.⁹⁰ Clearly employers, as millers-cum-planters, place themselves at the head of two lineages, sugarmill workers and field workers, between which they strive to prevent association in the wage determination context.

Sugarmillers presented an elaboration of the "within the family" ideology when they claimed that sugarmills were unscathed by statutory

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ van den Berghe, *Caneville*. p.140.

⁹⁰ *Financial Mail* 27.8.1982, p.1009.

job-reservation.⁹¹ When it was also claimed that all allusions to "racial and all other extraneous factors" were to be eliminated from wage agreements,⁹² it was a claim which was unlikely to be realised given the current reality of the wage determination process. Although references to gender have been dropped from the most recent wage schedules, it remains to be seen whether this implies that women are to receive the same treatment as men and whether they are to be accepted to do any kind of work other than that which they currently do.

Until 1983 the system of Industrial Council representation remained fundamentally "racial", not only in the sense of embracing racially-divided unions, but also with respect to the relative "bargaining" positions of the minute white sector of the workforce and the major black sector. Then in 1983 the Industrial Council's constitution was amended to give participating unions proportionate representation on the basis of one delegate per one thousand members. The balance of forces amongst workers' representatives on the Council was thus shifted in favour of the NUSMRE, which would have six delegates against the five other union representatives.⁹³ It would seem that employers are poised to propose a further revision, possibly by trying to revert to a dualistic Industrial Council.⁹⁴

The notional "de-racialisation" ties in closely with claims regarding the narrowing of the ("racial") wage gap. As close scrutiny of wage

⁹¹ SASJ 62:2(1979), p.65

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Although the NUSMRE was relatively well-placed as an employees' party, the first attempt at voting in the Industrial Council failed because the employers and the "white unions" constituted a bloc which could have its own way. An informal decision has been adopted to seek consensus in future, rather than to vote (Interview, E.Tough, Industrial Council Secretary, Durban, 9.9.1985). See B.Horlock, "Changing Face of Industrial Relations in the Industry", *South African Sugar Year Book* (1982-83), p.35.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

schedules will confirm, the lowest wages as a proportion of the highest wages have reflected a tendency of growth since the signing of the first agreement. In the schedules of the 1970s this "wage-narrowing" was accompanied by progressively improved leave and other conditions for semi- and unskilled workers. With regard to these most recent agreements in particular, it would be valuable to know in quantitative terms the extent to which the sector of sugarmill employees not covered by the agreements has been growing - before World War II only engineers and factory managers had constituted the salariat of the sugarmills; now the managerial/bureaucratic stratum is much expanded, and the highest wage-earners covered by the agreements are of relatively much lower occupational status today than they were yesteryear. Thus without examining the economic minutiae of the issue it may tentatively be said that if the wage-gap is narrowing so too is the proportion of the total sugarmilling workforce to which this notion relates narrowing.

And regarding the minimum wages laid down in the Industrial Council schedules, the SALDRU study on Industrial Council wage rates has shown that despite the large growth of semi- and unskilled workers' wages between 1973 and 1983, in Natal "Not one labourer's wage rate exceeds the Supplementary Living Level. This means that...all labourers' minimum wages fall below the level considered necessary to live a life resembling decency".⁹⁵ This claim is rejected by the Industrial Council's secretary as untenable and based on outdated information.⁹⁶ Indeed, although during the sugarocratic era sugarmillers had given the impression of being reluctant to negotiate in the Industrial Council, since the mid-1970s the Council has been portrayed by employers as being

⁹⁵ D.Budlender **et al** **Industrial Council Wage Rates**. Cape Town: SALDRU, 1983, p.24. ⁹⁴ Interview (to be detailed).

⁹⁶ Interview, E.Tough, **op cit**.

a vehicle for reform by consensus between them and their employees.

Summary

Simple and structural control are neither absolute nor mutually exclusive, and elements of both forms have co-existed in Natal's sugarmills since the industry was established. This co-existence was evident in the plantation sugarmill where the owner-operative relied upon a system of gang-labour within which the sirdar had the authority to motivate and discipline workers.

As the industrialisation of sugarmilling intensified, and sugar companies expanded, sugarocratic authority was delegated to general managers and factory managers. While general managers were, as essentially administrative chiefs, the first superordinate bureaucrats in sugarmilling, factory managers were charged with control over machinery and personnel at the point of production. The factory manager had a background in engineering, and in the pre-World War II period he and his subordinate engineers could lay claim to authority over the production process at large. During that period there was an obvious reluctance on the part of sugarocrats and engineers to admit chemists to the sugarmills, and when it was fully conceded in the wake of the 1925 sugar crisis and the 1926 Fahey Conference Agreement that chemists had a role in the production process, the pattern of authority was not readily altered to accommodate the new-comers.

The sugarocracy's deep-rooted confidence in machinery provided the basis for the continued inequality in the levels of authority vested in engineers and chemists respectively. However engineers had no sway in the sphere of pan-boiling, and the long-lasting autonomy of artisanal

pan-boilers reflected the limits of machine technology and mechanical specialists' authority.

After World War II the complexity of structural control developed apace both in the sense of bureaucratisation and technical control. Compound managers were employed universally as agents of control over African workers between their shifts, thus entrenching a sugarmill-domicile continuum; artisanal authority and autonomy were undermined by new technology; and the wage determination process was institutionalised. These developments had already had important ramifications for sugarmill labour by 1962, when the sugarocratic era closed. Since 1962, a new dimension was added to the developing pattern of control by the employers' use of ideology to inculcate workers' commitment to the sugar companies and to promote the ideal of a unitarist approach to capital/labour relations.

PART THREE

THE "COMMUNITY"

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SUGAR VILLAGE

Although there is a long and depressing history of workers housed by their industrialist employers, bourgeois owners have generally moved to concentrate their investments and control in the "hidden abode" of production, leaving it to the state to regulate social and ideological reproduction. Company towns, and this embraces many if not the majority of agro-industrial sugar complexes, do not reflect this general tendency. In those regions where the sugar village has doubled as a site of production and reproduction, sugarmillers have taken on the role of a local state *vis-à-vis* the village residents.

As in the case of work relations, the extra-work relations amongst South Africa's sugar village residents have historically been conditioned by structural and legislative factors over which the sugarcocracy has had no direct control. Where their own initiative has been applied to sugar village organisation, the Natal sugarcocrats have shown themselves to have had a certain unity of purpose and of practice. Their conformity to a number of written and unwritten "principles" regarding community, class, and quotidian culture were reflected in the physical infrastructure of the sugar villages. This "built environment" has had a bearing on the reproduction of the work relations discussed in the last three chapters.

These prefatory remarks should not be taken to imply a recognition of the existence of sugarcocratic hegemony. The limiting factor, that of employees' responses, is discussed in Chapter 8, and in this chapter it is only sugarcocratic aspirations and campaigns in the cause of hegemony

that are considered. After a general treatment of methods of sugarocratic involvement in social control, the Natal case is dealt with in four sections. The first section covers the built environment and population structure of the sugar villages. The following three sections involve a chronological analysis of the sugarocracy's policies on village life until the end of the sugarocratic period.

Sugarocrats and Social Control

During the later part of the nineteenth century, the sugarocrat in the Caribbean and in Portuguese America established his realm around his **centrale**, or **usina**. His agro-industrial complex represented the success of sugar production under a capitalist mode of production, although, as Ortiz had indicated with reference to Cuba in the early 1900s, it still retained certain pre-capitalist relations:

It is a complete social organism, as live and complex as a city or municipality, or a baronial keep with its surrounding fief of vassals, tenants, and serfs...
...all forming a complete empire with subject colonies...all this huge feudal territory is practically outside the jurisdiction of public law; the norms of private property hold sway there.¹

In northeastern Brazil the **usina** also in certain respects represented the personal triumph of the sugarocrat over the plantation owner or **senhor do engenho**. Owners of central sugarmills which appeared in that region during the 1870s were prevented by charter from owning farm lands, and their zones of cane capture were also legally assigned; both devices were intended to protect the owners of **engenhos**. Once the scheme's failure had been reluctantly acknowledged, **usinas** were from the

¹ F.Ortiz, **Cuban Counterpoint**. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947, quoted by S.W.Mintz, Foreword to **Sugar and Society in the Caribbean**, edited by R.Guerra y Sánchez. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.

1880s successfully established on the lands of former **engenhos**.²

The transition from **engenhos** to **usinas** was in other words more than a technological breakthrough in that it was attended by major social changes. Firstly, the **usina** was the property of bourgeois owners; secondly, it was kept in motion by wage-labourers; thirdly, its owner had economic and political interests which distinguished him from the planter; and finally, although it exhibited strains of plantation culture, the **usina's** culture embraced industrial rather than agrarian relations. Notwithstanding these changes, which were coincident rather than discrete events, the central industrialised sugarmill retained one critically important attribute of the erstwhile plantation, but on a much vaster scale:

Large industrial plants came into rural settings where economic units were characteristically small. The **central** became the economic and social core of the entire community, to the point where the manufacturing enterprise was on a par with the constituted political authorities.³

This claim lent weight to Ortiz' observation that by virtue of law and tradition, sugarocrats in the abovementioned regions wielded the same measure of control over the conditions of reproduction of their employees as had the plantocracy before them. Subsequent tendencies towards corporate sugarmill ownership, bureaucratic control, and heightened worker consciousness altered or eroded sugarocratic hegemony, yet certain continuities were perceptible in the social life of the sugar village.

The transition to capitalism in the former plantation societies is a relatively recent phenomenon, two or three generations past, and this

² K.S.Taylor, **Sugar and the Underdevelopment of Northeastern Brazil, 1500-1970**. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978, pp.68-69.

³ B.C.Swerling and V.P.Timoshenko, **The World's Sugar**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957, p.71.

temporal aspect in itself had significance for the continuing impress of plantation culture on the sugar village. Moreover, although workers scored important victories in their struggles against employers, the transition to capitalism had not fundamentally upset the balance between the individuals who dominated and those who laboured in the societies in question. As Frederick Cooper put it,

For slaves in many places and at many times emancipation...has been a time of disillusionment as well as joy. The individual plantation owner may have ceased to be lord and master over his slaves, but the planter class did not lose its power.⁴

There were two levels at which cultural practices with roots in the slave plantations continued in post-slavery plantation societies. On the one hand, continuity was manifested broadly across the entire society, and on the other hand it was manifested within the unit of sugar production. In the first instance the impress of racism, language, and rituals, on society are implied. Firstly, racism nurtured as a form of extra-economic control was entrenched in post-slavery society, and the distinction between poverty and wealth could be drawn in terms of skin pigmentation. Thus twentieth century Cuban society has been analysed by reference to "colour-class" categories,⁵ while it has been concluded that in Mauritius "plantation society retained its servile base after 1842".⁶ Secondly, the hybrid creole vernacular or *patois* endured the transition to capitalism as the language of the proletariat, while the language of those in power symbolised a link with seats of empire and metropolitan bourgeois culture. Thirdly, "African survivals" in the

4 F.Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p.1.

5 D.Booth, "Cuba, Color and the Revolution", *Science and Society* 40:2(1976), pp.129-172.

6 M.D.North Coombes, "Labour Problems in the Sugar Industry of Ile de France or Mauritius 1790-1842". Master's dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1978, p.334.

regions formerly hosting plantation slavery endowed workers with particular cultural attributes in the spheres of cuisine, music and dance, folklore, religion, marketing, traditions, and values.⁷ In short,

Emancipation no more put an end to the development of those [plantation] cultures and societies than it put an end to the oppressive control of the people who used to own the slaves bodily, and who subsequently proceeded to prolong that ownership in more subtle ways. The value systems and institutions forged during those centuries of slavery still have considerable utility.⁸

At the level of the agro-industrial sugar complex, patterns of village layout, and material culture in general, stand out as the most readily apparent expressions of continuity. Thus,

The center of life on a tropical estate was the "great house", the home of the owner, or, in his absence, that of the overseer...an imposing structure. Wherever possible, it stood in a commanding position, frequently facing the sea.⁹

And, "The plantation blacks lived in their own quarter some distance behind the great house".¹⁰ This arrangement, which had more than symbolic connotations, was replicated throughout the sugar colonies and kept intact after the passage of plantation slavery.¹¹

⁷ V.Rubin, "Cultural Perspectives in Caribbean Research", and C.Wagley, "Plantation America: A Culture Sphere". Both in **Caribbean Studies: A Symposium**, edited by V.Rubin. Jamaica: University College of the West Indies, 1957.

⁸ M.Schuler, "Afro-American Slave Culture". In **Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies**, edited by M.Craton. Toronto: Pergamon, 1979, p.129.

⁹ L.J.Ragatz, **The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833**. 1928. Reprint. New York: Octagon Books, 1971, pp.5 and 7. See N.Pike, **Sub-Tropical Rambles in the Land of the Aphanateryx**. London: Samson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873, pp.123-125 and 340, for descriptions of the houses and general ostentation of Mauritian planters. E.V.Goveia, **Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century**. Westpoint: Greenwood Press, 1980, pp.109-110, provides additional information on the extravagances of plantocracies.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27.

¹¹ See for example I.Vogeler, **The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture**. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981, pp.166-167.

Less apparent were the subtle variants of paternalism which permeated sugar village culture globally. In paternalism is grounded one of the more salient forms of influence exerted by sugarocrats on the culture of a relatively closed work and community situation; one of the strategems in the sugarocratic quest for class stability. Ostensible benevolence, or even well-intended largesse extended by sugarmillers to employees, constitutes the material veneer of paternalism. Beneath these acts lies the owner's imperative of securing the compliance of an exploited workforce whom he daily has to face as employer. Because paternalism involves the direct and personal interface between master and subject, it tends to fade when "traditional authority" is superseded by bureaucratic organisation of the work situation.¹² That is not to say that where once it was deeply embedded within social relations, paternalism is ended with the development of capitalism. Paternalism may indeed persist, albeit reduced to considerably lesser significance. As Genovese saw it, "paternalism only exists as an echo of a displaced era when it passes into modern bourgeois society".¹³ Paternalism is, then, a transitory relationship, symptomatic of a particular stage in the history of class relations and work-place culture. Besides this historical qualification, paternalism should be recognised as "a loose descriptive term", although it can refer to "a profoundly important component not only of ideology but of the actual institutional mediation of social relations".¹⁴ Furthermore, employers may be forced "into various forms of entirely unpaternal behaviour...[and] it is the limits

¹² On traditional authority see M.Weber, **The Theory of Social and Economic Organization**. New York: Free Press, 1947, pp.341-358. On the transformation of traditional authority see R.Sennett, **Authority**. New York: Vintage Books, 1981, p.21; and P.Joyce, **Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in later Victorian England**. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, p.136.

¹³ E.D.Genovese, **Roll, Jordan, Roll**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p.679.

¹⁴ E.P.Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?", **Social History** 3:2(1978), pp.133-165.

of paternalism which are impressive, not its victory".¹⁵

It would be overly simplistic to regard deference as the obverse of paternalism, intimating thus that where employers practice paternalism, deference is the concomitant employee response. Such a definition also leads easily to an interpretation of deference that sees it as the consummation of paternalism; it leads equally easily to a conflation of internalised deference and pragmatic or ritualistic deference. Matters are not made easier given that much ambiguity surrounds the conceptualisation and interpretation of deference. Whereas it has been argued that "the deferential worker identifies closely with his social superiors and seeks contacts with them in and out of work",¹⁶ it has been claimed elsewhere that "the deferential worker does not identify himself with his superiors or strive to reach their status; he defers to them socially as well as politically".¹⁷ Instead of drawing the inference that a conceptual impasse exists, the ambiguity should be taken to be a cautionary injunction against an undue emphasis on deference (or paternalism) when considering class stability.

Both Joyce and Newby have shown the parallels between paternalism and deference where "traditional authority" prevails,¹⁸ but in presenting deference as a form of quiescence which is reflected in deferential behaviour and deferential attitudes, they have also made the important

¹⁵ H.I.Dutton and J.E.King, "The Limits of Paternalism: The Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-1854", *Social History* 7:1(1982), pp.59-74.

¹⁶ J.Curran, "Class Imagery, Work Environment and Community", *British Journal of Sociology* 32:1(1981), pp.111-126.

¹⁷ D.Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society". In *Working-Class Images of Society*, edited by M.Bulmer. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

¹⁸ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics.*; and H.Newby, *The Deferential Worker*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979. See also H.Newby, "Paternalism and Capitalism ". In *Industrial Society: Class, Cleavage and Control*, edited by R.Scuse. London: Allen & Unwin, 1977.

observation that it is maintained by the momentum of family and community life. Deference can in other words be conceived of as a quiescent response to class rule, which is based on an imagery of class dependence as opposed to an imagery of class domination. While it might not suppress the nurture of worker solidarity, deference tends to complement paternalism by being also rooted in a hierarchical image of society.

With the links between deference and paternalism established, it remains briefly to consider evidence of paternalism at work in a sugarmilling context. Paternalism, it has been suggested, is during a particular period merely the most tolerable of tactics amongst the range of employers' controls; it is moreover on the one hand an historically impermanent relationship, and on the other hand it does not exclude the use of coercion. Paternalism was commonly witnessed during the period of plantation slavery, yet, as Saunders has argued,¹⁹ labour employed under an indenture system in Australia's sugar industry was an unlikely focus for paternalism given the transience of the workers in question. Paternalism has been observed in different forms in twentieth century sugar villages. It has been written that in northeastern Brazil during the 1950s, "on the factory plantations there is a mild form of paternalism which is stronger...[near] to the house of the **usineiro**".²⁰ Michael Manley also found in the 1950s that paternalism was, in the Jamaican sugar industry, a "focus for all that is ambivalent in the employer/employee relationship".²¹ Elsewhere, in the Tuman sugar

19 K.Saunders, "'Troublesome Servants': The Strategies of Resistance Employed by Melanesian Indentured Labourers on Plantations in Colonial Queensland", **Journal of Pacific History** 14:3-4(1979), pp.168-183.

20 H.W.Hutchinson, **Village and Plantation Life in Northeastern Brazil**. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1957, p.71.

21 M.Manley, **A Voice at the Workplace**. London: Andre Deutsch, 1975, p.58.

complex in Peru, a system of "coercive paternalism" flourished in the early 1970s. There, as far as the family of owners was concerned, "subordinates were expendable and would be dismissed if it was necessary for the preservation of the paternal guardian role that the family arrogated to itself".²²

The survival of coercive paternalism in sugar complexes into the latter half of the twentieth century points to the significance and strength of the control which owners have over employees in company towns. Villages serving sugarmills have not universally been company towns in the sense of sugarmill owners having erected housing at their expense on their own land.²³ However, where the land and buildings forming the sugar village have constituted company property, owners have related to company personnel as employers and landlords at once.

The annals of the culture of company towns attest to the extraordinary power exercised by owners over their employees,²⁴ but they also include episodes of rebellion.²⁵ Though the company town does not provide a water-tight guarantee against rebellion, it represents a structural and very powerful form of control over workers. While owners of company towns hold workers in a "double grip",²⁶ they have the opportunity of engaging directly in forms of social control which other employers seldom have. As Patrick Joyce found in his study of nineteenth century

²² C.Scott, "The Labour Process, Class Conflict and Politics in the Peruvian Sugar Industry", *Development and Change* 10:1(1979), pp.57-89.

²³ See for example C.H.Grant, "Company Towns in the Caribbean: A Preliminary Analysis of Christianburg-Wismar-Mackenzie", *Caribbean Studies* 11:1(1971), pp.46-72.

²⁴ H.G.Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1976, pp.326-343; L.Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1940, pp.393-491; and Sennett, *Authority*. pp.62-77.

²⁵ Gutman, *Work*. op cit.; and Sennett, *Authority*. pp.62-63.

²⁶ C.Abrams, *Housing in the Modern World*. London: Faber & Faber, p.145.

factory culture in northern England, it was "by pervading quotidian life and permeating the loyalties of occupation and place that employer influence worked".²⁷ Might the same be said about the culture of the South African sugarmill? Certainly, as this chapter shows, sugarmillers did indeed develop an interest in fostering "loyalties of occupation and place" in their sugar villages.

The Natal Sugar Village

Two centrally important influences on sugar village layout in Natal were the site of the sugarmill and residential segregation according to racial criteria. In order to draw sufficient water for boilers and other appliances, and also to transport certain wastes, the sugarmill had to be located close to a river. How the sugarmill's attendant village then developed depended partly on the nature of company land holdings, whether for example the river represented a property boundary or not; and partly upon local topography. Within these co-ordinates and the dictates of racism, the sugar village took on a cell-like form.

White employees' houses, including that of the manager, which was usually built on a promontory overlooking the village, constituted one cell. This part of the village might on its periphery have had the houses occupied by "creole" Mauritian settlers. The houses for white employees, predominantly detached but including a small number that were semi-detached, were spread over a greater surface than other housing areas in the village; with each house typically surrounded by a fenced garden. Single white sugarmill employees, predominantly apprentices and permanent or contracted artisans, were lodged in what was generally known as the "mess". Within the white residential area the occupational

²⁷ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*. p.192.

hierarchy of the sugarmill was broadly perceptible in the size and style of the houses and gardens, in the age of the buildings, and in their relative elevation or distance from the sugarmill. And whereas all employees in the pre-World War II village would have been in easy walking distance from the sugarmill, each new batch of houses built since the war took the outer borders of the white cell further from the sugarmill and usually also onto higher ground.

In stark contrast to the white cell, the Indian workers' quarters were generally relatively close to the sugarmill, and characteristically densely concentrated. The quality of the housing was always greatly inferior to that provided for whites, and the sizes of the houses much smaller. While whites commonly had servants' quarters and garages in their grounds, the only outbuildings that might have been expected in the pre-World War II Indian cell were latrines, if these were provided at all.

Another cell of the sugar village, the smallest of all, was the compound for African workers. The increasing number of African workers as a proportion of all sugarmill workers did not much alter the proportion of company property occupied by their single-men's compounds. The provision of family quarters for Africans was rare before World War II, and only in some cases did African "villages" arise within the sugar villages, apart from the compounds.

As a rule the permanent population of the sugar village did not exceed a few hundred people, but because some villages were not completely isolated these were not always "closed" agro-industrial complexes as such. Tongaat presented such an exception, abutted as it was by a

flourishing town and situated also on a main road. In the case of Felixton, a paper mill was erected in the mid-1950s next to the sugarmill, from which it received bagasse to be used in paper making. Felixton's village was expanded by the arrival of the paper mill's personnel, many of the white staff having come from Italy, but it remained as "closed" as any other sugar village which was on company property and at a terminal point within the public road system. Regardless of the relative distance from other settlements, the villages situated on sugar company properties had few inhabitants who were not employed by those companies. These "outsiders" were associated with the services which were not provided by the companies, such as post offices and railway stations, both state-run, and general trading stores and butcheries.

The cell-like structure of the sugar village was mirrored in the social practice of segregation. Few whites would ever have had cause to visit an Indian worker's home, while those blacks who entered a white worker's home would have done so only in the context of domestic service or house maintenance, rather than on a social call. Unlike Indian domestic servants (washer-women and men (**dhobis**)), who lived permanently in the Indian quarters of the village as members of sugarmill workers' families, African domestic workers in white employees' homes were officially isolated from black sugarmill workers.

That the sugar village was a company village, standing on company property, and subject to company policy, did not in itself account for the existence of social practices which mirrored the built environment. Also inimical to the development of an organic, if class divided, "village community" was the fact that the Natal sugar village "way of life" was (and undoubtedly still is) shot through with racism. The

material and ideological underpinnings of the sugar village worked together to produce a facade of stability which, in sugarocratic historiography at least, has concealed the fundamental disunity of the sugarmilling "community".

Although there is a tendency to regard the sugar village as being stable, it should be mentioned that when a sugarmill is closed down its allied village loses its *raison d'être*. The centralisation of sugar production has proceeded apace in the post-World War II period, and three sugarmills were closed during the 1970s alone, with far-reaching social implications.²⁸ That the problem persists is reflected in the attempt made in 1978 by C.G.Smith to buy Union Co-op.'s Dalton sugarmill, and a bid made by Hulett's in 1979 for the Umfolozi Co-op.'s sugarmill.²⁹ Success in the first venture would have enabled C.G.Smith to close the Dalton sugarmill and direct cane supplies to its own Noodsberg sugarmill. Union Co-op. refused the offer for various reasons, including the detrimental social upheaval it envisaged would follow the closure of the sugarmill. Umfolozi also turned down the offer for their sugarmill.³⁰

Sugarmill Workers' Housing and Health
during the Indentures Period: 1860-1914

If black sugarmill workers' wages were low, there was little by way of compensation in the conditions under which they had to live in the sugar villages. An examination of the history of their housing shows that until the closing years of the sugarocratic era standards were appallingly low, if standards as such could be spoken of at all, and

²⁸ See D.Lincoln, "South African Sugar Mill Labour during the 1970s", *South African Labour Bulletin* 6:6(1981), pp.37-48.

²⁹ SASJ 62:11(1978), p.587.

³⁰ SASJ 63:7(1979), p.332, and 63:9(1979), p.420.

even where expenditures were made on improvements, blacks were housed in structures which were generally regarded to be inferior to Transvaal mine workers' accommodation, let alone that of white sugarmill workers. Such a racial housing policy in the sugar villages could be linked to what emerges from available evidence on nutrition, sanitation, and other factors, as racial epidemics.

The housing norms established during the Indian indentures period were to prevail as the basis of sugarocratic housing policy until at least the 1930s. The four-man Wragg Commission, one of whom was J.R.Saunders, found indentured workers' accommodation in the late 1880s to have been of three types; namely, iron-roofed masonry barracks, corrugated iron "lines", and grass huts. The Commissioners found little objectionable about the constructions themselves, and their recommendations related to measures that might be taken to improve hygiene and to lower the risk of fire.³¹ It is not surprising that a retrospective study on the indentures period which used the Wragg Commission's Report as a vehicle for discussing housing and amenities should have concluded that

the indentured Indians on the sugar estates were secured against want by a system which provided both for the regular inspection of their living conditions and the introduction of reforms considered essential to their well being...

The general working conditions for indentured Indians...were satisfactory. They were well housed...Their health was found to be good.³²

The historical record provides a different picture, and even if, as Polak wrote,

On such estates as those of Sir James Liege Hulett, the Hon. Marshall Campbell, and Mr. Hindson...the indentured

³¹ **Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission 1885-1887**, 1887.

³² A.G.Choonoo, "Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal, 1860-1911, with Particular Reference to its Role in the Development of the Natal Sugar Industry". Master's dissertation, University of Natal, 1967, pp.217-218.

labourers' material welfare is far better than it would have been had they remained in India,³³

these employers were "the worst enemies of the Indian community".³⁴ The source of enmity, according to Polak, was in the justification given the indenture system by such material differentials. Whether or not there was substance to this view, it is nevertheless evident that the indenture system had permitted sugarmillers, as much as any other employer, to depress the costs of labour power by housing workers under conditions that were by no stretch of the imagination salutary.

Housing provided for indentured Indian workers was frequently criticised by the Protector of Immigrants. Although his criticisms diminished after the turn of the twentieth century, when the sugarocracy could be said to have come into its own both as a group of sugarmillers and as a political body in virtual control of the Indian Immigration Trust Board, Medical Officers furnished evidence of insanitary and grossly inadequate accommodation. For example, in 1902 a Medical Officer reported that in the Kearsney district, where Hulett had his tea estates *inter alia*,

most of the barracks are very far from being in a sanitary condition. The miserable grass hut, the usual accommodation supplied for the Indian, is about the best receptacle and retainer of injurious micro-organisms that could possibly be devised.³⁵

It was equally common to find, as Stanger's Medical Officer did in 1902, that "Privies are almost unknown, the calls of nature being relieved...as near as possible to the hut door".³⁶ The ubiquitous grass hut was however being replaced from about this time by "brick and zinc lines", probably to inhibit diseases, but when another contemporary Medical Officer claimed that the prevalence of overcrowding in the

³³ H.S.L.Polak, **The Indians of South Africa: Helots within the Empire and How They are Treated**. Madras: G.A.Natesan & Co., 1909(?), p.22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1902.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

rudimentary abodes generally provided, was "entirely due to the tendency the Indians have for huddling together",³⁷ he was contributing to the ideological explanations that abounded for the link between poor housing and the spread of disease.

The persistence of insanitary and inadequate housing conditions can be put down to the imbalance, in the employers' eyes, between ideological and, above all, cost considerations, on the one hand, and criticisms and disease on the other: the former would outweigh the latter in determining housing policy in the sugar villages. Thus the observer who charged in 1905 that certain employers provided "piggeries" for the accommodation of indentured workers,³⁸ would have his porcine analogy repeated some two decades later by government investigators into sugar workers' housing.³⁹ The erection of "lines" in place of grass huts did little in itself to alter the indentured workers' quality of life, and they were not relieved of affliction by the tubercular, venereal, and intestinal diseases which sprang from both their housing and demographic circumstances. The workers' rations did not offer the most efficient means of equipping the body to combat ill health.

During the indentures period indentured men had generally received as a minimum ration a pound each of rice and mealie meal per day, while women and children under the age of 10 years had qualified for half this amount; regulations were also made for the supply in lesser amounts of dhol, salt fish, ghee, and salt, but these were not always observed.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Protector of Immigrants, Supplementary Report*, 1891.

³⁸ *Indian Opinion* 15.4.1905, pp.237-238.

³⁹ "Hulett's are housing Natives in a species of piggery" (TAD, GNLB 253, 357/16/53, Assistant Health Officer to Director of Native Labour, 2.12.1921).

⁴⁰ *Report of the Coolie Commission*, 1872.

Insanitary housing and the sugarocracy's disregard for the relevant statutes were aggravated by its lack of concern for environmental factors, and workers were placed in what must have been a frustratingly vulnerable position. The siting of barracks and compounds close to the banks of rivers made their occupants vulnerable to flooding, while pollutants presented a threat to the health of those close to or reliant upon river waters. A case in point was revealed during 1895, when an official investigation was conducted after a complaint from the Tongaat School Committee about the "nuisance" emanating from the Tongaat sugarmill. The police report found a severe health hazard and an "unbearable" smell, particularly near the company's Indian compound. It was recorded that Saunders and his manager were doing their best to eliminate the problem, not by putting an end to pollution, but by mixing ash with the sulphurous wastes going into the river.⁴¹

If polluted water was an endemic problem for black sugarmill workers, it was no less serious than the threat of floods. When devastating floods occurred in the coastal district in May 1905, many lives were lost, including, in the Inanda district, those of a white railway employee and 51 black men, women, and children, mostly from sugar villages.⁴² This was an extreme but not unique case of black sugar workers' quarters being flooded in Natal, and it appears not to have fully convinced

⁴¹ NAD, CSO 1447, 1895/6156, Relative to Nuisance Emanating from the Tongaat Sugarmill, 1895.

⁴² Warner Report in **Government Gazette** 1.8.1905.

See also Goble Report in **Government Gazette** 18.7.1905, which attracted harsh criticism from the **Indian Opinion** 5.8.1905, p.506. In the light of these facts it was nothing short of flagrant negligence on the part of employers which had given cause for an Inspector of Native Labour to report in 1919 that barracks were still generally to be found "on the banks of bifurcating streams and in some places on a steep slope in close proximity of a stream. These barracks are constantly subject to inundation of storm water the bad effects of which are too well known to need reference" (TAD, GNLB 308, Inspector of Native Labourers to Director of Native Labour, 12.11.1919).

employers to refrain from providing housing in low-lying areas that were susceptible to flooding.

All these factors - the quality and the situation of housing, and the quality and quantity of rations - which were quite within the control of sugarmillers, were compounded to make endemic ill-health and periodic epidemics the lot of their black workers. The 1902 measles epidemic in the Mount Edgecombe district, which claimed the lives of hundreds of infants;⁴³ the malaria epidemics, particularly those which ravaged coastal Natal in 1905,⁴⁴ the nutrition-related diseases - these were either attributable to or severely aggravated by the work and housing environment created by the sugarocracy. And if black sugarmill workers, particularly those who were serving indentures, sought redress, their complaints usually fell on deaf ears.

In the years around the turn of this century the **Annual Reports** of the Protector of Immigrants almost invariably referred to complaints by Indian workers as "frivolous and unfounded", yet they always carried contradictory testimony of widespread assault, high death rates, numerous suicides, and insanitary housing as commonplace conditions in the sugar villages.⁴⁵ An official inquiry in 1900 into the murder of two Reynolds Bros. employees was reported by the Protector of Immigrants to have found "general ill-treatment" on that company's estates,⁴⁶ and there is every reason to believe that the company was not unique in this respect.

⁴³ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1902.

⁴⁴ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1905 and Report for 1906.

There was another severe malaria epidemic in the early 1930s (Report on Investigation into Malaria in the Union of South Africa, 1930-31).

⁴⁵ See for example Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1896, Report for 1897, and Report for 1902.

⁴⁶ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1900.

So long as the majority of its workforce was constricted by indentures, the sugarocracy appears to have found little cause for practicing systematic paternalism on its properties. It took official inquiries in 1906 to improve conditions on two of Natal's largest sugar properties (in one case leading to a reduction of the death rate, amongst Indian workers and their families, from 39% to 14%) and the Protector found it appropriate to recommend in this regard that Reynolds Bros. and Natal Estates should, as Tongaat had started doing, appoint a medical officer to visit Indian workers' quarters daily.⁴⁷ What scant evidence there is of overt sugarocratic concern for the welfare of indentured workers suggests that it was inspired by little more than a recognition that these workers were human. The sugarocracy approached Indian workers in what was essentially a suppressive and punitive manner. Their approach was based on expectations of unquestioning worker submissiveness, and on the assumption that workers' expectations were fully met by wages, quarters, and rations.

Prelude to Sugarocratic Welfarism: 1914-late 1930s

After the indenture system had been abolished, little was placed on record about sugarmill workers' housing. It was only when the sugarocracy came to address its problem of finding a substitute for the system that information was again recorded which showed no positive changes to have been effected in the interim. One upshot of the sugarocracy's lobbying to have the Union Government respond to its demand for a stable supply of African labour, after the abolition of the indenture system, was the Département of Native Affairs' investigation into the conditions facing labour in the sugar industry. The searing

⁴⁷ Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1906 and Report for 1908.

indictment of the sugarcocracy that ensued from the investigation was not accompanied by action that would bring them to book for their employment practices, and sugarocrats reacted without the same sense of urgency conveyed by the officials.

The investigation started early in 1919 with a Departmental Inspector visiting the south coast sugar estates and other industrial plants, and later that year the Director of Native Labour, Pritchard, also did a tour of inspection. The findings made in this first round of inspections gave unprecedented insights into what had been taking place on sugar company property. For this reason alone the inspection and their immediate repercussions warrant special attention; but more so because the Departmental inspectorate appointed early in 1920, as a consequence of the inspection, was withdrawn in 1928, whereafter detailed information was again not recorded.

An amendment in 1915 to the Natal Public Health Act of 1901 had laid down methods of sanitation using water- and pail-closets, it had made specifications for workers' housing which included a restriction on the building of back-to-back rows of quarters, and it also drew attention to the existence of special regulations pertaining to employers of more than 50 workers who, like any other employer of more than 10, were required to submit all building plans for official approval.⁴⁸ When the reports of 1919 are portrayed against the background of this statute, the housing situation for black sugarmill workers is seen to have been totally untenable.

Excerpts from the report on north coast sugar properties follow which

⁴⁸ Government Gazette 16.6.1915.

related to sugarmill workers:

Natal Estates ...Three blocks of back to back buildings about 6 ft. high earth and brick floors, no fire places, bunks or ventilation. Remarkable to say that in one of the rooms there was a growing ant heap. Cooking done in wood & iron lean to erected by the natives and a perfect disgrace. No latrines, bunks or washing facilities, water carried from dam and Mill, about 500 yards away. Complaints were also made of being troubled by jigger fleas and other vermin...

Central Factory ...One six roomed wood and iron structure 10 x 9 flat roof, earth floors, windows at back. No fire places, bunks, latrines or washing facilities. Cooking done in one of rooms. Water carried from river. Two built brick rooms. Same remarks as above except that cooking is done in lean to wood and iron structure, entirely unsuited. Three rooms wood and iron structure, floor much below door level, no windows, bunks, fire places, latrines or washing facilities...

Tinley Manor ...One row hollow block buildings 9 x 10 room, windows at back, fire places and brick floors. One row reed-grass walls thatched grass roof building, earth floors, no bunks, fire places, ventilation, latrines or washing facilities. Cooking done in open and in rooms...

Darnall ...About 30 to 35 acres of land is set aside for natives to erect their own buildings or huts and with the exception of a few wood and iron structures which are exclusively used for togt labourers the whole of this land is pitted with huts of all descriptions and the natives are left to themselves to work out their own salvation. A state of affairs which should not be allowed to continue under any circumstances. No latrines or washing facilities provided...

Amatikulu ...Wood and iron four roomed building 25 x 25, brick and cement floors, windows at back and front. No fire places. Cooking done in old dilapidated wood and iron covering, earth floors. No bunks or washing facilities. Latrines trench system reed-grass screening wooden frame for natives to squat on...

ZSM ...With the exception of three wood and iron buildings earth floors, no bunks, fire places or washing facilities. Windows at back and sides. The remainder of the huts consist of wattle and daub reed-grass thatched roof, no bunks, fire places, and a few with windows at back. These barracks are situated between two drains, one carrying a nice flow of water and the other is full of stagnant water and throws out a most obnoxious odour and certainly not conducive to the native. No latrines provided. Cooking done in wood and iron structure, fire place and earth floors...⁴⁹

These descriptions adequately convey the order of things in African

49 TAD, GNLB 308, Dundee Native Affairs Dept. Inspector to Director of Native Labour, 4.12.1919.

sugarmill workers' compounds as they were found to be in 1919. The reports provided the basis upon which the government officials mounted their attack on employers, and although by 1921 many new barracks had been built in response to this pressure, Pritchard could still record at the end of that year that

in the case of large employers who have in times of prosperity been warned to set their house in order and have neglected to do so, we cannot allow the continued housing of natives under conditions such as those described.⁵⁰

Hulett's in particular attracted approbrium from the relevant officials. Company housing at Felixton had first caught the attention of the Health Department even before the sugarmill there became operative. During 1910 the Natal Board of Health had appointed a committee, under the chairmanship of Tongaat's E.Saunders, to consider the desirability of certain wood and iron cottages intended for occupation by whites in the embryonic village. The question was resolved in conjunction with J.L.Hulett and his son Albert.⁵¹ Then in 1917 the Health Department had confronted Hulett's over the quality of housing for Felixton's African workers.⁵² It was obvious by 1921 that the company had consistently evaded the Department's directives on this latter question. As the local Native Affairs inspector assessed the situation at Felixton in 1921,

more than ordinary pressure should be brought to bear on Huletts as the present native quarters are a disgrace to any employer of native labour and should be condemned by the Health Department without further notice.⁵³

He remarked further that

⁵⁰ TAD, GNLB 253, 357/16/53, Pritchard to Park Ross, 13.12.1921.

⁵¹ NAD, DPH 81/1911, Report of E.Saunders to Natal Board of Health, 4.10.1910; and NAD, DPH 81/1911, J.L.Hulett to Board of Health, 10.10.1910.

⁵² TAD, GNLB 253, Park Ross to Director of Native Labour, 2.12.1921.

⁵³ TAD, GNLB 308, Northern Coastal Area Inspector to Director of Native Labour, 26.8.1921.

The native compound at this mill is not fit to house human beings and is a very ramshackle affair and in nearly every respect is not what our regulations ask for.⁵⁴

The Durban-based Assistant Health Officer, Park Ross, took up the issue, and when he conveyed his views on the matter to the Director of Native Labour, he showed that the Health Department had its own difficulties with Hulett's:

You will see that after everything is arranged Messrs. Huletts are not prepared to go on with anything, and [at Felixton] they are housing Natives in a species of piggery.

I have pressed them similarly at Tinley Manor, and have come to some sort of arrangement as to what is to be done, but so far I have failed to get any definite statement in writing.

At Tinley Manor new grass shanties were being erected in which to house Natives in absolute disregard of all regulations.

At Felixton natives, you will see, are housed in an insanitary way.⁵⁵

The major thrust of the action taken by the Department of Native Affairs, following its investigation, was directed against conditions under which African workers were housed, although their wages, health, and rations were also dealt with. Regarding housing, it was clear that African sugarmill workers were in many instances being accommodated in structures which had formerly been Indian workers' "lines", but just as often under conditions which were similar to, if not worse than, those that existed before such "lines" had been erected.

Just as in cases where housing had originally been in an illegal state and then left to decay, the nutrition of sugarmill workers had been poor in the indentures period and was now as bad as or worse than this. The conditions under which the preparation of food was carried out were

⁵⁴ TAD, GNLB 253, Northern Coastal Area Inspector to Assistant Health Officer, 22.11.1921.

⁵⁵ TAD, GNLB 253, Park Ross to Director of Native Labour, 2.12.1921.

hardly conducive to healthy nutritional habits, not that the food rations were themselves nutritionally adequate. What the reports of the early 1920s showed was that each African worker was generally provided with 3 lbs. of mealie meal per day, with some sugarmillers providing a half pound more than the norm, or even giving unrestricted amounts; in every case 3 lbs. of mealie meal was the minimum ration, and in some cases the only ration. Where meat was given to African workers, it was usually 1 lb. per week; St. Lucia provided 1 lb. a fortnight and Felixton 2 lb. a week, while Darnall provided 1/- per week for the purchase of meat. Some sugarmillers allowed, in addition to the basic fare, access to sugar and treacle, and in the unusual case of Amatikulu, African workers were given a pound of mealies and a quarter pound of beans every Sunday. In some instances beans were regularly supplied but then usually only to workers from the Transkei. In at least one case, that of Chaka's Kraal, the provision of food was used as a form of extra-economic compulsion. That sugarmill's African workers would receive one and a quarter pounds of beans and a shilling for meat weekly, in addition to their normal ration of three and a half pounds of mealie meal per day, on condition that they had not taken any time off during the week.⁵⁶

Sugarocratic neglect of the welfare of black sugarmill workers was the order of the day. Instead of reacting positively when confronted by official injunctions, the material responses of sugarmillers, and their stated intentions regarding improvements, left government officials with a clear impression that they were recalcitrant reformers, who were capitalising on inadequate regulations, and who were regularly in need

⁵⁶ TAD, GNLB 308, Dundee Native Affairs Dept. Inspector to Director of Native Labour, 4.12.1919.

of inspectors' visits "to keep the employers up to the mark".⁵⁷ No amount of official pressure or evidence of discomfort or disaster seemed able to shake sugarmillers from their disposition towards black workers. Thus, when in 1925 the government proposed the scrapping of hospitals built under regulations made for the care of indentured Indians, and the formation of a hospital board and dressing stations, the "sugar men" were divided in their response to this attempt to rectify what was seen to be a "distinctly unsatisfactory" state of affairs.⁵⁸

No less satisfactory was the sugarmillers' reluctance to improve black workers' rations. Park Ross waged a long battle against employers in the sugar industry over the question of workers' diets. He argued that there were severe vitamin deficiencies, and that immediate attention needed to be given to effect dietary changes if scurvy was to be countered. Addressing himself to the SASA membership in 1927, Park Ross expressed the wish that his views be known "by shareholders in some of your concerns whose interest therein is dividends, while my interest is that of the health of the employee. Believe me these issues are the same".⁵⁹

When later in 1927 amendments to the 1911 Native Recruitment Act were proposed concerning rations, Natal's Chief Native Commissioner wrote to the Secretary for Native Affairs:

As you are aware the Sugar Planters are opposed to the amendment...and as the law now stands the Department cannot do more than it is doing at present in the way of gentle persuasion.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ TAD, GNLB 308, 107/19/97, Central Coastal Area Native Affairs Dept. Inspector to Director of Native Labour, 23.8.1921.

⁵⁸ **Department of Public Health, Report for 1925.** See also TAD, GNLB 308, Director of Native Labour to Secretary for Public Health, 17.6.1921.

⁵⁹ TAD, GNLB 308, Park Ross to SASA Secretary, 26.3.1927.

⁶⁰ TAD, GNLB 308, Chief Native Commissioner (Natal) to Secretary for Native Affairs, 11.4.1927.

The sugarmillers' rejoinder to governmental censure on housing and health matters was invariably stated in terms relating to the strictures imposed by a depressed sugar market. This did not detract from the appalling state of affairs which had prevailed unchecked for so long, in and out of times of employers' prosperity, nor did it reflect the way in which sugarmillers were handling the statutes which had a bearing on their employment practices. But more importantly, attempts by sugarmillers to justify their practices with respect to black sugarmill workers were starkly contradicted by their actions *vis-à-vis* white employees.

Inhabitants of the sugar villages had before World War I been left very much to themselves outside the work situation. Within the context of strict segregation social life was informal and unstructured. Apart from activities that might have been engaged in by religious groups, recreation was devoid of institutionalised organisation. Then during the prosperous period (for sugarmillers) between the end of World War I and the international sugar crisis in 1925, sugarmillers began to show an interest in the recreation and general welfare of white employees. Although this interest may have reflected paternalism, its implicit purpose was to cultivate a sense of community amongst white sugarmill personnel.

Community-building involved the sugarocracy in a wide range of investments covering all aspects of life in the sugar village. There were endeavours made to solidify the white employees' community by involving them in an economic sense with their companies, such as when in 1919 thirty three whites were granted "employees' shares" in Tongaat

Sugar Co..⁶¹ (Both Tongaat and Natal Estates also established Employees' Trading Companies, the former owning a shop and a service station, and the latter a hotel at Mount Edgecombe in addition to its shop.)⁶² Religious practice was encouraged through the provision of a site or by financing the construction of a church.⁶³ By erecting recreation halls in the sugar villages the sugarocracy established a balance between the sacred and the profane amenities available for the use of white employees.

The opening of a new recreation hall invariably called for the presence of some sugarocratic or managerial figurehead, but it is unlikely that any such occasion was more auspicious than when Smuts, who was on a tour of Zululand opened the ZSM hall in 1922;⁶⁴ all the more so because the blood had hardly dried since Smuts' troops had crushed the 1922 white mine workers' strike, and now on behalf of one of his several close acquaintances in the sugarocracy he was performing the honours at the opening of a hall for white sugarmill workers. These halls provided a venue for social activities as well as being the nucleus for employees' recreational and sport clubs, such as that initiated in Mount Edgecombe in 1924, with the company (Natal Estates) contributing £1 for each pound collected by members.⁶⁵

Besides being used as a club house, the village recreation hall was where sugarmillers hosted parties for their white employees. White adults could generally expect their employers to provide an annual end-of-season party, which in some cases was attended by the sugarocratic hosts. There were other occasions where companies provided parties, such

⁶¹ *Condenser* 5:5(1967), p.3.

⁶² *SASJ* 16:1(1932), p.59.

⁶³ See for example *SASJ* 4:5(1920), p.461, and 17:2(1933), p.72.

⁶⁴ *SASJ* 6:9(1922), p.659.

⁶⁵ *South African Sugar Year Book and General Directory* (1930), p.70.

as when in 1928 W.A.Campbell left for Britain at the beginning of 6 months leave, and Natal Estates threw a party for 200 guests.⁶⁶ It was not only the adults who enjoyed the sugarmillers' hospitality. By the early 1930s annual "Christmas trees" - parties for the children of white sugarmill personnel - were traditionally given and sometimes attended by members of sugarocratic families.⁶⁷

Another event which was to become a traditional item on white sugarmill employees' calendars was the inter-sugarmill sports tournament. In 1935 an annual inter-sugarmill bowling tournament was inaugurated, with teams competing for the silver W.E.R.Edwards trophy. The popularity of bowls was to spread to all the sugar villages, and bowling greens were provided by employers who might also, as C.G.Smith did in 1935 at Chaka's Kraal, have officiated at their opening.⁶⁸

The sugarocracy's community-building exercise was clearly predicated upon an acceptance of the group to which it was directed, as a permanent and stable community worthy of and responsive to encouragement in the extra-work sphere. There would appear to be nothing different between such an exercise and sugarocratic paternalism towards black workers; there was however a difference, and this lay in ideological subtleties. Whereas both had the objective of promoting stability, community-building involved primarily the strengthening of bonds within a designated racial group, while paternalism towards black workers was more specifically related to the search for legitimacy; the former was

⁶⁶ SASJ 12:11(1928), p.658.

⁶⁷ The tradition of sugarocrats personally hosting Christmas parties was maintained by members of the Crookes family until well after World War II in the C.G.Smith sugar villages; in the case of Doornkop this was done in the general manager's house. See SASJ 15:1(1931), p.12; SASJ 40:1(1956), p.61; and SASJ 40:1(1956), p.61.

⁶⁸ SASJ 20:9(1936), p.535.

based on the assumption that employee allegiance already existed, the latter on the assumption of the need to nurture allegiance.

Sugarocratic Paternalism and Reformism in
Social Control Methods: late 1930s-1962

Enveloped in a threatening aura of employer rule, sugar villages were not in the pre-1930s period characterised by benevolent paternalism. It has been shown that the sugarocracy's employment practices in the sphere of housing were certainly until the 1930s far from salutary.

Then during the 1940s a measure of change began to be effected in the material conditions for the residents of the sugar villages. This "enlightenment" was manifested in two ways, of which improved workers' housing constituted one. The other aspect was of an ideological nature. It involved efforts to cultivate, in the minds of their employees, an image of company benevolence and philanthropy which deserved to be reciprocated by deferential allegiance to, and strong identification with, company objectives. Extensive schemes were undertaken to improve or replace housing for black and for white employees.⁶⁹ New houses were constructed for white employees, and where electricity and water-borne sanitation were not yet laid on these were provided. Brick cottages were erected for Indian personnel at Tongaat and elsewhere, and African workers' compounds were refurbished or replaced. These housing schemes featured in reviews of companies' expenditures throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, as did the establishment in Tongaat of a company-sponsored

⁶⁹ The government's inspections between 1935 and 1938 which were conducted with the aim of re-housing all industrially-employed "non-Europeans" by the end of 1941 may have been a consideration, although this was nowhere suggested in sugar industry documents. See **Annual Reports, Department of Public Health**, 1931 and 1935; the latter made reference to sugar estates. On new housing in the early 1940s see **South African Sugar Year Book** (1941-42), pp.154-155.

Employees' Welfare Association, and the issue by the same company of 50000 shares to be sold to "permanent staff" of 10 years or more standing, so that each would have a shareholding equal to the amount of their annual salary.⁷⁰

The strides taken by the sugarocracy during the 1940s and 1950s to ameliorate living conditions and strengthen employees' allegiance were in step with the development of paternalistic ideals and prevailing high profits, and they did not in any sense eliminate the discrepancies which racial housing policies involved. Thus when the sugarmill at Pongola neared completion early in 1954, its new village embodied both the post-war spirit of employer welfarism and the principles of racial housing policy.⁷¹

Some of the principles which were embodied in sugarocratic endeavours to provide improved housing were not flaunted before workers. Referring in 1955 to company expenditure on housing for black workers, E.Saunders informed shareholders that the old barracks for Indian sugarmill workers at Tongaat

which apart from being outdated and in a bad state of repair, were situated on valuable land adjacent to the mill which will no doubt be required in time for normal factory expansion...;⁷²

and his vice-chairman, Polkinghorne, added that

though it is practically impossible to gauge the effect of improved living conditions in terms of money, I have no doubt that recent housing improvements carried out by your company have already served to stabilise that class

⁷⁰ More than half the shares were subscribed to in the first year of the scheme's operation. See company reports contained in SASJ 31:8(1947), and 32:9(1948).

⁷¹ SASJ 38:4(1954), pp.227-233.

⁷² Reported in SASJ 39:9(1955).

of labour for whom they were provided which should lead to a general improvement in labour efficiency.⁷³

Presumably the jubilation of the ostensible beneficiaries of the housing scheme in question was not allowed to be clouded by such talk of control and profits that is the elixir of the shareholder.

If improved material conditions were appreciated and if sugarocratic paternalism was favourably received, then the workers' own consciousness might be the source of loyalty and industry that compulsion was formerly intended to bring about. In this, sugarocrats were not merely heeding the injunctions of officials, over the preceding decades, to give attention to improved employment conditions. There was also the "Tongaati philosophy" which had to be acknowledged as a powerful force for change in Tongaati and, ultimately, in other sugar villages.

Frequently extolled in the pages of **The Condenser**, the Tongaati philosophy was most fully articulated by Watson in his book **Tongaati**, an excerpt from which follows:

Remember first that Tongaati is constituted as one community, a unity of people, a holistic synthesis of vastly varying human beings. The object is to maintain that unity; to clothe it eventually - all of it, each component of it - with the garments of perfection. That, said and done, is what Tongaati has declared to be its aim: a perfect sugar undertaking in an ideal multi-racial community; not a sugar enterprise associated with a group of separate communities...[Tongaati] is a trictyledonous unity of 7450 souls (or thereabouts) the majority of whom are taking part in the evolvement of a prototype for community life in which, while each group will develop its own social pattern and live largely, but not necessarily exclusively, within the domain of its own social activities, mutual interests, goodwill, and confidence will surmount racial prejudices...

...there is nothing repugnant about the idea of the sorting of individuals into groups or classes or clubs by aggregation...Aggregation into such communities and

⁷³ Ibid.

for such reasons has been a sociological process wherever there has been a culture of any kind since time immemorial.⁷⁴

Although professing antipathy for apartheid, the proponents of the Tongaat philosophy contradictorily advanced the notion of "aggregation", which implied the ideological and material imposition of racial segregation by the company. Euphemism and "sociological" rhetoric in Watson's work could not obscure the parallels between apartheid and aggregation.

Though explicitly presented as a notion unique to Tongaat, aggregation merely represented a grandiose justification of the segregationist practices which were uniformly evident in all the sugar villages. This uniformity was most clearly demonstrated in the treatment of those émigré Mauritian sugarmill workers and their descendants who were regarded as "creoles" or "coloureds".

In order to furnish an exposition of the position of these émigré Mauritian artisans some contextual and historical material must be adduced. In his study of "Durban coloureds", Dickie-Clark found in the political behaviour of his subjects an "attempt to remain apolitical" and an "inability to support any decided, clear-cut political orientation".⁷⁵ This political ambivalence he attributed to social and political marginality: they aspired to the political status of the white electorate, with whom they had cultural affinity; and they found no cause to identify with Indians, Africans or others classified as "coloured".⁷⁶ That the people he was studying were largely of Mauritian descent is instructive, although this factor does not of itself explain

⁷⁴ R.G.T. Watson, *Tongaati: An African Experiment*. London: Hutchinson, 1960, p.228.

⁷⁵ H.F. Dickie-Clark, *The Marginal Situation: A Sociological Study of a Coloured Group*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, p.123.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

the position of Mauritian sugarmill artisans in the face of decades of ostracism and discrimination.

According to van den Berghe in his study of Tongaat, "fear of discrimination from the Europeans" had led "coloured" Mauritian sugarmill personnel in that town to "keep themselves apart". He also sought to show that "their status is ambiguous and their position is marginal".⁷⁷ So the day-to-day life of these Mauritian artisans, while it may have borne a strong resemblance to that of white work colleagues, was nevertheless distinguished by barriers of consciousness, legal statute, and company politics. In this sense these artisans were certainly "marginal", but their position in the sugarmill's occupational hierarchy was far from marginal. Indeed, as has been shown, they were indispensable in that context particularly in the sphere of sugar-boiling.

What must be understood is that marginalisation was not simply an attitudinal stance taken by "coloured" Mauritian sugarmill artisans. Their marginality reflected a systematic process of segregation. Before this process began in earnest in 1950, Mauritian artisans had, as has been shown in Chapter 5, gained for themselves a reputation as dedicated workers occupying significant positions in the sugarmill. As case in point was that of a worker who spent over thirty years in Hulett's Tinley Manor sugarmill before retiring in 1931; he was

a most experienced mill man in almost every department of sugar manufacture. He was a first class sugar boiler, juice preparer and mill overseer. He was also compound manager for some years.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ P.L.van den Berghe, **Caneville: The Social Structure of a South African Town**. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964, pp.155-156.

⁷⁸ From an un-dated newspaper obituary given to me by the son of the deceased (Interviewed, Mount Edgecombe, 2.7.1982).

Even if social ostracism was experienced by workers who were regarded as "creoles", this did not necessarily imply that their status in the sugarmill was in any way affected by their skin-colour: before World War II, it was recalled,

The chief engineer was the workman; he worked beside you. The second engineer was the chief electrician, and he worked. The boss will come up and hold the ladder while you climb up there...You had a problem you'd go to the office and see the boss,⁷⁹

And, as a retired artisan explained, they were indeed dedicated to the sugarmill and its performance:

that was our job. That was our bread and butter, so if they had to send for us anytime of the night there's a breakdown, we had to go because now we think in our minds that this factory is my factory...Right up to now, if they had to send me (well I'm pensioned off) they had to send for me, the door rings and say "you are required at the factory urgently", we're going. I'm not going to say "oah, going to the factory". No! I'm thinking it's my bread and butter, I've got to go. I've got to keep that factory going. Today, what they've got, they've given me a 'phone, which we never had before. Each chap that they think is liable to be called out...and they 'phone him up. That's today...In those days the police boy used to come and knock at the door and we used to go.⁸⁰

Furthermore, in the words of this former welder, they were not entirely apathetic:

We were in the AEU [Amalgamated Engineering Union]...we weren't in the sugar industry union. So the artisans [exclusive of pan-boilers] were in the AEU...It was very active. We had a shop steward...but the sugarmill, they weren't very pleased about that...because...they like to keep the workmen down...Before we joined the union, we used to work on a Sunday...[for] two bob or a day off...When we joined the union the union had to make the sugarmill pay the blokes; if they work Sunday 8 hours, they got to be paid 8 hours at double time.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Interview with former pan-boiler of Mauritian descent, Tongaat, 28.6.1982.

⁸⁰ Interview with former artisan of Mauritian descent, Mount Edgecombe district, 2.7.1982.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Numerous instances of family succession in particular sugarmills, frequently in the very same line of work, meant that a close-knit network evolved amongst the Mauritian sugarmill artisanate. In the pre-World War II years this closeness was manifested for example when members of three Mauritian families related by marriage travelled annually from various sugarmills and

they used to spend the whole week between Christmas and New Year [together]. All the young men used to go hunting...for a whole week it was like a clan...Don't talk about crayfish, mussels...and these big paraffin tins with hams; six or seven hams being cooked...they used to make grog...overproof cane spirit with the raisins inside and tea, in a large cask.⁸²

Before World War II there was no uniformity amongst sugar villages regarding the location of Mauritian artisans:

Before that we [at Mount Edgecombe] lived by the mill, this way and that way...we used to live all round, all over the place.⁸³

And in the late 1940s a Mauritian fitter at Tongaat lived with his family in a house which stood in the very mill yard. Elsewhere Mauritian artisans were residentially concentrated on grounds of occupation rather than country of origin. But after the passage in 1950 of the Population Registration Act, "the Mauritian village" became a general and conspicuous element of the sugarmilling village at large, for "The population register drove us apart" and "The companies put us apart".⁸⁴ From another perspective,

We never felt any discrimination, not by the company. They were open to everybody...alright, they put the whites one side and the Mauritians the other side, but when it came to a mixed function we were invited.⁸⁵

Individual perceptual differences aside, Mauritian artisans now faced a

⁸² Interview with former pan-boiler of Mauritian descent, *op cit.*

⁸³ Interview with former artisan of Mauritian descent, *op cit.*

⁸⁴ Interview with wife of artisan, both of Mauritian descent, Gledhow, 29.6.1982.

⁸⁵ Interview with former artisan of Mauritian descent, *op cit.*

common separation from their work colleagues.

Complementing residential segregation were the conditions which generally led to the exclusion of Mauritian artisans and their families from schools and recreational facilities restricted to whites. Sometimes Mauritian children classified white were refused entry to white schools on grounds of their dark skin pigmentation - a Mauritian fitter resigned from a Natal sugar company in the early 1950s after his child was thus treated⁸⁶ - and many children were as a result educated at private, Roman Catholic schools; in Swaziland; and in at least one case in Moçambique; rather than submit to the dictates of the state schooling system.

Moreover, the inhabitants of "the Mauritian village" frequently experienced other forms of social ostracism. Not only were most regarded as "coloureds" in a racist milieu, but they were widely treated by whites as inferior. One interviewee spoke of the way in which, at Chaka's Kraal "White Mauritians resented us", and how the Mauritian donor of the Roman Catholic church building in that village drew a distinction between "Mauritians and Mauritians"; "because he thought he owned the church", he thus attempted to segregate the congregation. The incident may have been exceptional, but far more exceptional was its very recognition by the informant, a woman of Mauritian descent married to a Mauritian sugarmill artisan. Male informants, by their responses, appeared to de-emphasise discrimination against them to the extent of intimating that they accepted it and withdrew from situations where racism might be overtly manifested.

The environment into which they retreated was one characterised by

⁸⁶ Interview with former Mauritius-born artisan, Tongaat, 25.6.1982.

intimate family life, observance of the tenets of Roman Catholicism, and stoical resignation; an environment characterised by intermarriage and close ties amongst settler families. As more marriages took place outside the expatriate Mauritian community, "the Mauritian village" remained the context for a tightly-woven, if rapidly diminishing community.

The marginalisation of "creole" Mauritian sugarmill workers was sealed by their own reluctance to seek common cause with Indian and African sugarmill workers who were also oppressed by the racist practices of their employers. As van den Berghe saw it, they

have internalized the White colour prejudices, seek acceptance into the White group, and reject the Indians and Africans all the more vigorously in an attempt to validate their own claims to White status.⁸⁷

Denied unqualified acceptance by whites, these Mauritian artisans fell into the position which they were assigned to by ruling class racism as much as by their own ideology.

That the sugarocracy had pressed "creole", or "coloured" Mauritian sugarmill workers into the mould cast by the apartheid state gave the lie to any claims that aggregation was anything but a segregationist policy implicitly rooted in racist ideology. It was in the improvement of housing that the Tongaat philosophy and the general sugarocratic attitude in the post-World War II years represented a departure from past thinking on the question of employee welfare, but deliberate segregation persisted.

What the Tongaat philosophy stood for was an intellectually constructed paternalism, a thought out and systematic programme for the amelioration

⁸⁷ van den Berghe, *Caneville.*, p.195.

of employment conditions with a view to securing stable social relations and raised productivity. It was a sophisticated form of paternalism the inherent limits of which lay in its ideological mainspring, as van den Berghe's dissection thereof has demonstrated.

In Tongaat at the very end of the sugarocratic era, van den Berghe found the

power system is one of autocratic paternalism complicated by a three-way segregation and discrimination on grounds of colour. All racial groups, including the super-ordinate White group, are subjected to this policy of centralized paternalism.⁸⁸

Four mechanisms, according to the author, maintained this system of power. Firstly, the "bread and circuses" device was implemented by providing good medical care, rations, housing, and tightly organised recreation. Secondly, the "family affair" technique was resorted to "to isolate the community from outside influences, and to prevent the organization of collective opposition". Thirdly, co-optation was used in an attempt to defuse opposition or potential opposition. Fourthly, potential opposition was controlled by company involvement in trade union activities, in sports associations, and in the local Indian Taxpayers' Association.⁸⁹ Following an examination of these and other practices by Tongaat's owners and managers, van den Berghe reached the conclusion that because black workers did not subscribe to paternalism, that ideology remained only in the minds of the employers. This gave rise to "a one-sided relationship that calls for the development of an elaborate mythology".⁹⁰ The mythology he wrote of took the form of

not only consciously devised rationalizations of the ruling class to make the masses accept White domination. They are also self-deceiving defence mechanisms of the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.120.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.87-93.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.250.

dominant group which allow that group to rule and to discriminate with a clear conscience.⁹¹

By reducing the Tongaat philosophy to its mythological origins van den Berghe achieved a great deal. However his main conclusions were made within a "race relations" framework, which misses or avoids the point to be made here, namely that sugarocratic paternalism was ultimately a facade for class embattlement. Although sugarocratic paternalism was indeed a tool of racial domination, that domination served (and was intended to serve) another purpose beyond the ambit of "race relations", namely that of stable social (class) relations. If racial domination had been the ultimate objective, there would have been no rationale for paternalism towards black workers to have emerged in the sugar villages when or as systematically as it did; there was certainly no question of sugarmillers having at the time been faced with a "race relations" crisis.

From the time that the Tongaat philosophy was conceived, Tongaat began taking on its now characteristic architectural style, with every new building given a Cape-Dutch exterior along lines proposed by the artist Gwelo Goodman. No other sugar village was given such a homogenous, if contrived, identity, nor did all reflect the paternalistic heights reached there, but Tongaat provided an example which was in most other respects emulated elsewhere.

Tongaat was poised to take the lead in extending community-building to black workers in the early 1960s, when a wind-fall on the world sugar market was to justify a large capital outlay on new housing, inter

⁹¹ Ibid., p.251.

alia.⁹² Whether in Tongaat or in any other sugar village, sugarmill workers were constantly going to be reminded of the benevolence of the "father"-employer. New housing schemes would be named after sugarocratic personages, as would be sports grounds, and if other names were to be given to such amenities they would generally reflect the sugarocracy's concern with entrenching what it saw to be the cultural plurality of its employees.

Summary

Although never deviating from a racially tiered system of privilege and recognition, over time the sugarocracy changed its attitude towards the social conditions of existence in the sugar villages in various ways. Sugarocratic racism had in the pre-World War II period been manifested as a rapacious approach to the housing and nutrition of black workers. Subsequently racism was cast in the mould of cultural pluralism, meaning that segregation and racial differentiation were rationalised on the grounds of cultural (and thus occupational) peculiarities. The change of attitude from disdain to overt interest in social control that was seen to have come about in the latter period, was reflected in the conscious development of sugarocratic paternalism.

Paternalism now embodied a more benevolent approach to housing and living conditions in general, but the implicit programme of community-building was extended beyond the white cell of the sugar village to first the Indian, and then the African cells, in a clearly divisive fashion. Thus just as any changes that took place within the racial division of sugarmill labour left that system intact, so too was the

⁹² Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry of the Republic of South Africa, 1970, p.11.

cell-like structure of the sugar village preserved. What had changed was the style of sugarocratic control over village life, such that ideology had been brought to the fore as an instrument of policy and rationalisation, and, more importantly, as a means of promoting sugarocratic legitimacy and stable social relations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WORKERS' RESPONSES

The terrain of sugarmill workers' experiences has been shaped by dialectical forces. While the sugarocratic impress has been immense, the workers' methods of coping with working conditions have reverberated on the sugarmill owners. Up to this point, little mention has been made of the responses of sugarmill employees to their working conditions, or of their responses to the range of controls which have been associated with sugarocratic rule. The history of sugarocratic domination has so far been implicitly rather than explicitly presented as a history of constant struggle to contain the resistance of sugarmill workers. It has been shown how, as an important dimension of the culture of the sugarmill, coercion, legal statutes, ideological sophistry, and material sanctions have been arrayed against the sugarocrats' employees. This leaves open the question of the degree to which sugarocrats' self-arrogated prerogatives of class rule were met with workers' acquiescence, and how sugarmill workers have contested sugarocratic domination. It therefore remains to be demonstrated in what sense the history of sugarocratic domination and the history of workers' responses have been causally related elements of the history of class struggle in the sphere of sugar production.

Two forms of workers' responses have historically interested employers in the sugar industry (as much as in any other). Workers' submissiveness in the face of personal or structural controls has interested employers as an ideal, while organised workers' resistance has elicited employers' interest in repression. However, these two forms of workers' responses have not necessarily been mutually exclusive. Moreover, accommodation and organised resistance have not

been the only responses made by sugarmill workers, but it is these, and principally the latter, which have most directly influenced employers' practices and the course followed by the labour process itself.

Notwithstanding limits on readily available primary material, it is possible to discern quite distinct themes and continuities in the history of workers' responses to the sugarmilling labour process in Natal. A conceptual framework for the analysis of these responses is advanced in the first part of this chapter. The following four sections are devoted to a chronological examination of sugarmill workers' responses to the conditions and controls under which they have laboured in the Natal sugar industry.

Accommodation and Resistance

The world's cane sugarmill workers have historically laboured under quite distinct conditions: they have generally worked in rural areas rather than in the midst of urban communities, and their places of work have been located in the least industrialised parts of the globe. As the following references indicate, sugarmill workers - whether slaves, indentured or completely proletarianised - have reacted to their condition with a complex, and frequently spontaneous, combination of accommodation and resistance.

Genovese, regarding plantation slaves, considered that their resistance was tempered by paternalism in such a way that

their action tended to become defensive and to aim at protecting the individuals against aggression and abuse; it could not readily pass into an effective weapon for liberation...

[But] the slaves found an opportunity to translate paternalism into a doctrine different from that

understood by their masters and to forge it into a weapon of resistance to assertions that slavery was a natural condition for blacks, that blacks were racially inferior, and that black slaves had no rights or legitimate claims of their own.

Thus, the slaves, by accepting a paternalistic ethos and legitimizing class rule, developed their most powerful defense against the dehumanization implicit in slavery.¹

An important point is contained in this passage. There was the limit to paternalism in the slave plantations; there also was the resistance to dehumanisation, the creative and dynamic response to oppression. Although their defences might have taken on the appearance of quiescence, slaves did show themselves to be capable and willing to confront their masters in open revolt. This capacity was still being demonstrated by slaves in the sugar-producing British West Indies during the first half of the nineteenth century, "on the very eve of freedom".²

The response of enslaved sugarmill workers had been deeply embedded in slave culture in a sense which Braithwaite captured well in his conception of "the slaves' cultural double-competence".³ Their ability to survive depended largely on each slave's competence to confront oppression in her or his own consciousness,

to be both marginal and participatory at the same time; to conceive of oneself as part of society and, still, at the same time, not a part of it.

The double-competence of the slaves in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean permitted them to live in the spirit/secular continuum...It also allowed them to live in a spiritual/political continuum, which radicalised them into constant revolt.⁴

Faced by quite a different form of obligation to their masters, indentured workers articulated their responses to class rule and

¹ E.D.Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, pp.5 and 7.

² M.Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816-1832", *Past and Present* 85(1979), pp.99-125.

³ E.K.Braithwaite, "Commentary Three". In *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies*, edited by M.Craton. Toronto: Pergamon, 1979.

⁴ *Ibid.*

oppression without reference to paternalism. Nonetheless, as Walter Rodney pointed out with regard to indentured workers in Guyana,

Moments of struggle and moments of compromise appeared within the same historical conjuncture, but ultimately, resistance rather than accommodation asserted itself as the principal aspect of this contradiction.⁵

Regarding proletarian sugarmill workers, Mintz has observed, with reference to Puerto Rico, that

Often the predominant rural population is landless, wage-earning, store-buying, and corporately employed - a proletariat, in short, but a rural proletariat. Study of rural proletarian communities suggests that their inhabitants may have a sturdy awareness of their class membership, but this is not to say that this awareness is equally shared or that it leads to a predictable homogeneity in political (or other) attitudes.⁶

Proletarian sugarmill workers have indeed demonstrated an ability to resist exploitation, but their special condition would seem to have placed limits on their resistance such that they have sometimes, and quite conspicuously, appeared as comparative late-comers in regional working class movements.⁷ This speaks more of constrained working class organisation than accommodation, for proletarian sugar workers have always had defensive, albeit often individual, rejoinders to exploitation and oppression.

5 W.Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. London: Heinemann, 1981, p.151.

6 S.W.Mintz, "The Rural Proletariat and the Problem of the Rural Proletarian Consciousness", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1:3(1974), pp. 291-325.

7 This has for example been observed in the case of Cuba by F.Grobart, "The Cuban Working Class Movement from 1925 to 1933", *Science and Society* 39:1(1975), pp.73-103; and in the case of Java by J.Ingleson, "Worker Consciousness and Labour Unions in Colonial Java", *Pacific Affairs* 54:3(1981), pp.485-501. For discussions on sugarmill workers' struggles against employers and the state see K.W.J.Post, "The Politics of Protest in Jamaica, 1938: Some Problems of Analysis and Conceptualization", *Social and Economic Studies* 18:4(1969), pp.374-390; and the chapter on the so-called Huk Rebellion in the Philippines in J.Walton, *Reluctant Rebels: Comparative Studies of Revolution and Underdevelopment*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

On the question of unorganised, or rather "informal", responses by proletarian workers it is instructive to refer to van Onselen's injunction regarding the development of worker consciousness:

In settler-dominated economies with repressive labour legislation, it is, in the first instance, to the less dramatic underlying worker responses that we have to turn in looking for this consciousness.⁸

That is to say, workers' self-awareness as exploited workers does not have organisation as a pre-requisite nor "formal" industrial action as a necessary consequence.

Until the 1930s it could generally be said that worker consciousness in the sugarmill workers of the Caribbean countries and Mauritius (and Natal) was widely expressed in the "less dramatic" responses spoken of by van Onselen and, as Mintz had recorded in Puerto Rico, without leading to "a predictable homogeneity in political attitudes". A new phase in the history of these sugarmill workers' resistance was ushered in by the strikes which swept through the sugar colonies during the 1930s. Although the workers in question may still not have had a sound organisational base, their collective resistance announced a new-found awareness, a consolidated awareness of their class and its capacities. Put another way, worker consciousness in the sugarmill workers of the old plantation colonies in the Caribbean and the Mascarenes was now showing signs of developing into a collective awareness of class as an economic category and as a social condition.

Yet although sugarmill workers in the forementioned regions had adopted a more assertive stance, conflict could not have been an endemic feature to the extent of excluding accommodation. This accommodation was an

⁸ C.van Onselen, "Worker Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920". In **Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe**, by I.R.Phimister and C.van Onselen. Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1978, p.19.

imponderable element in the sugarmiller/worker relationship. It may have been manifested as "moments of compromise" or as quiescence; it may have reflected pragmatism or it may have reflected internalised deference. The largely passive act of accommodation did not of itself suggest its underlying rationale; rather, it was trends of control and resistance which offered an indication of that rationale. On the one historical extreme, in an ideal typical sense, bondage and paternalism were accompanied by ostensible quiescence; on the other, proletarian freedom and managerialism were accompanied by negotiated compromise; but throughout, the accommodative act generally concealed the tensions which fuelled the resistance/accommodation dialectic.

If it is a complex matter to provide an empirically-based explanation of acquiescence, it is hardly any easier to trace the history of workers' responses in general when there is but scant primary material to be adduced. Such is the difficulty of explaining sugarmill workers' responses in Natal. What follows is an attempt to portray some of the more important themes in workers' responses to the sugarmilling labour process in Natal, particularly the development of worker consciousness as expressed through forms of resistance ranging from "undramatic" and individual acts to collective actions undertaken spontaneously or in an organised manner.

Two observations must be made before proceeding. It has to be noted that throughout (and for some time beyond) the indentures period, black sugar workers were not confined exclusively to any particular branch of work: they were deployed in the sugarmill and the fields on a fairly flexible basis, and during the off-crop there was a tendency for employers to concentrate them in field work. The second point to be made is that ascribed ethnicity or ethnic identity had a material basis.

White and black workers in the sugar industry faced quite different conditions (and not uncommonly responded differently), and black workers sometimes struggled independently as "Africans" or as "Indians" (and then according to whether they were indentured or "free").

Responding to the Indian Indenture System in Natal: 1860-1914

For the greater part of the Natal sugar industry's existence the majority of sugarmill workers were indentured or of subservient status within the ambit of Masters and Servants statutes. Since 1850 all African workers in Natal had effectively been "servants". Although there were some similarities between the legal status of these Africans and that of indentured Indians, there were also significant differences. Thus, for example, indentured Indian workers were legally protected from flogging but, by contrast to "servants", they were not allowed to sue for wages. Between 1859 and 1872 free Indians had almost equal status to "servants"; from 1872 they were by statute technically differentiated from African workers; and from 1888 they were liable to register as "servants", although still statutorily differentiated from African workers.⁹ Not surprisingly, under the divisive and suppressive legal and social climate in general, Natal's sugarmill workers generally coped with the rigours imposed by the sugarmilling labour process through disparate and often spontaneous actions. The most constrictive work environment and the greatest preponderance of individualised and spontaneous responses by sugarmill workers were to be seen during the operation of the Indian indenture system.

The most extreme response by Indian workers during the indentures period

⁹ See F.Ginwala, "Class, Consciousness and Control - Indian South Africans 1860-1946". PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1974, pp.44-53.

was suicide. Instances of suicides reported by the Protector of Immigrants were not classified according to place of work, and so all may not have occurred among sugar workers. Nevertheless the statistics may be assumed to have reflected the **status quo** on sugar properties as much as on the northern Natal coal mines or elsewhere. The number of suicides committed by Indian workers in Natal grew steadily throughout the indentures period. With the mounting preponderance of free Indians in Natal, the suicide rate amongst this category grew phenomenally, but it never approached the rate of suicides among indentured workers. These rates (for indentured and free Indians respectively) during the early years of this century have been compared with the suicide rate in India, and are reflected in Table 13.¹⁰

TABLE 13: SUICIDE RATES COMPARED: INDIA AND NATAL

	SUICIDE RATES PER MILLION		
	INDIA	NATAL (Indentured Indians)	NATAL (Free Indians)
1904	33,5	469	89
1905	40,0	582	249
1906	39,0	661	213

Source: B Pachai, "The History of the 'Indian Opinion' 1903-1914," *Archives Year Book for South African History* 24 (1963).

What was most tragic about suicides was that their impression on the conditions of torment was inconsequential. Some of those conditions

¹⁰ Although these rates showed a decline after 1906, Tinker's classic work on indentures as "a new form of slavery" contained the calculation that the suicide rate amongst all Indians in Natal was ten times higher in the closing years of the indentures period than India's maximum (H.Tinker, **A New System of Slavery**. London: Oxford University Press, 1974, p.201). According to H.S.L.Polak, **The Indians of South Africa: Helots within the Empire and how they are treated**. Madras: G.A.Nateson, 1909(?), p.25, the suicide rate for indentured Indians in Natal was never less than 14 times the rate for India. See also B.Pachai, "The History of the **Indian Opinion** 1903-1914", *Archives Year Book for South African History* 24(1963).

were not even always linked by contemporary observers to the indenture system or its experiential and demographic connotations; they were more often than not regarded as the outcome of personal and domestic traumas. Amongst those who did link the ill-treatment of indentured workers with suicide and desertion was Gandhi.¹¹ The comments of the Protector of Immigrants reflected the uncritical alternative view. In his **Report for 1903** the Protector cited an instance where he visited an estate on the grounds that a recent suicide by an indentured worker appeared to have resulted from ill-treatment; his finding being that "he really committed suicide because the work on a Sugar Estate was not congenial to him".¹² While an official such as the Protector of Immigrants could associate suicide with personal trauma, he did not perceive that such a distressed state on the part of the victim might have been explicable in terms of the indenture system. Thus in his **Report for 1904** he claimed that "There have been 30 convictions against employers, managers, etc., for assaulting their indentured Indians, but affairs of this kind do not necessarily prove ill-treatment".¹³ And on the following page of the same document, where he noted the large influx of indentured workers from Madras, he expressed the concern that many of them were

not suited for agricultural purposes, thereby causing endless trouble with the employer, while many are young and ill-developed. The tendency to suicide is very marked.¹⁴

While there can be little doubt that suicide had some significance within the culture of the sugarmill during the indentures period, it did not reflect worker consciousness as such. Nor did suicide contest employers' domination. The same might be said of alcohol and drug

¹¹ M.Gandhi, **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**. Delhi: Government of India, 1959 - , Vol.II, pp.20-24.

¹² **Protector of Immigrants, Report for 1903.**

¹³ **Ibid., Report for 1904.**

¹⁴ **Ibid.**

abuse, both of which have elsewhere been regarded as forms of resistance to the sugarmilling labour process.¹⁵ But that is not to say that there were not other "less dramatic" responses which did indeed reflect the development of worker consciousness during the indentures period, and which were treated by employers as resistance.

During its early years the indenture system itself had circumscribed the cause for resistance, the possibilities for different forms of resistance, and the repercussions for resistance. Once the first indentures had expired new possibilities presented themselves, of which the most obvious was to leave the sugar estates and then either to stay in Natal or return to India. Many free Indians in Natal remained in the sugar industry and earned improved wages, while those in India testified to the plight of their compatriots in Natal.¹⁶ Except for the individual satisfaction which might have been gained by leaving an employer or by having him pay one a wage far in excess of that received during the period of indenture, the indenture system was not made any more acceptable. If anything, the comparative disadvantage of being indentured may have been felt on a mounting scale.

In the last decade of the indenture system's operation, the sentences passed on Indian workers in Natal for "absence without leave", absence from roll-call or disobedience, insolence, "leaving work in a body", and "neglecting" to work two hours on Sundays, ran into the thousands, with

¹⁵ See R.Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness amongst African Workers", *Review of African Political Economy* 19(1980), pp.8-22; K.Saunders, "'Troublesome Servants': The Strategies of Resistance Employed by Melanesian Indentured Labourers on Plantations in Colonial Queensland", *Journal of Pacific History* 14:3-4(1979), pp.168-183; R.Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984, pp.132-134; and M.Tayal, "Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14:4(1977), pp.519-547.

¹⁶ See L.M.Thompson, "Indian Immigration into Natal 1860-1872", *Archives Year Book for South African History* 2(1952), p.66.

the great majority of these sentences being passed for the first two charges.¹⁷ When in November 1913 Indian sugar workers gave their support to the campaign initiated by Gandhi as passive resistance, their actions bore testimony to a capacity also for concerted resistance of a far greater magnitude than "leaving work in a body".

When they joined the 1913 strike, the Indian sugar workers were in the first instance making a collective statement about their political rights.¹⁸ The strike severely affected sugar companies, particularly in the Mount Edgecombe, Verulam, and Tongaat districts, but the workers who became involved initially made it quite clear that their actions were directed not against employers but against the government.¹⁹ Thus although production was disrupted by the temporary stoppage of cane-cutting, Indian sugarmill workers at Mount Edgecombe worked until all already harvested cane had been crushed,²⁰ and at Tongaat Indian workers assisted in extinguishing a cane fire during the strike.²¹ Employers on

¹⁷ See particularly **Annual Reports, Protector of Immigrants**, 1902 to 1910.

The penalties on indentured Indian workers for "unlawful absence from work" had been laid out in **NLC, Sessional Papers**, 2, 1885.

¹⁸ See Ginwala, "Indian South Africans".

J.D.Beall and M.D.North Coombes, "The 1913 Disturbances in Natal: The Social and Economic Background to 'Passive Resistance'", unpublished mimeo., have concluded that "for the strikers [Gandhi] appeared as a late-comer, a negotiator and only dubiously, as a friend".

Although statistics showing the extent of the strike are not easy to come by, towards the very end of the strike the situation amongst Indians along the sugar belt was as follows:

	Working	On Strike	Gaoled
North Coast	11060	302	810
South Coast	7864	154	92
Zululand	1400	-	-

(TAD, GG 898, Governor General to Secretary of State, 11.12.1913.)

¹⁹ Ginwala, "Indian South Africans", p.218.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ R.G.T.Watson, **Tongaati: An African Experiment**. London: Hutchinson, 1960, p.136.

the other hand did not make any concessions under the circumstances, and they collaborated with the state in trying to put down the strike. Military force was used to cordon off estates; many workers were wounded by bullets at Mount Edgecombe; and rations were withheld.²²

The striking sugar workers appear to have surpassed Gandhi's expectations. Much to Gandhi's distress, he had had to explain to Marshall Campbell that

after my arrest the workers [Gandhi's co-workers] found it impossible to control the men and the movement became not only spontaneous, but it assumed gigantic proportions...I must freely admit that I would have certainly endeavoured to call out your men also; but...yours would have been the last estate.²³

In his reply, Campbell chastised Gandhi for the consequences of the strike in Victoria County: indentured workers, wrote Campbell, "were only induced to come out by grave threats of personal violence made by persons whom I believe to be your agents, two of whom were arrested and fined".²⁴ Gandhi was obviously disturbed by Campbell's attack, and he admonished the striking workers as follows:

Victoria County has not been as free from violence as the Newcastle district was. You retaliated. I do not care whether it was under provocation or not, but you retaliated, and have used sticks and stones, and you have burnt sugarcane. That is not passive resistance...If...I was an indentured Indian working for the Hon. Mr. Marshall Campbell, Mr. Saunders, or other employer, and if I found my treatment not just, I would not go to the Protector - I would go to my master and ask for justice; and if he would not grant it, I would say that I would remain there without food or drink until it was granted. I am quite sure that the stoniest heart will be melted by passive resistance.²⁵

While rapping the workers over the knuckles, Gandhi publicly lauded Campbell for his support in the Senate for the repeal of the £3

²² Ginwala, "Indian South Africans", pp.220-222.

²³ Gandhi, **Collected Works**. Vol.XII, pp.298-299.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.313.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.468-470.

"licence" payable by free Indians.²⁶ Gandhi had obviously underestimated the convictions of Indian sugar workers regarding resistance and the way in which they would find in the political strike an opportunity to express themselves also as discontented workers.

While the north coast may well have been the scene of more intense action during the strike, the south coast was only to a degree less affected. The south coast was not spared from violence either. On 25th November a detachment of 13 policemen went to the sugarmiller Hawksworth's Beneva Estate on the south coast, where 250 Indian workers had joined the strike. An excerpt from the police report described the way in which passive resistance was handled by owners and troops before erupting into violence:

I spoke to the Indians through a European Interpreter and asked them if they were willing to go to work, they said they were not, Mr Hawksworth then said he wanted them arrested I again spoke to them and said they would have to come to Umzinto with me and see the Magistrate, they agreed to this and some made a move as if to start on the road to Umzinto, just then Indian Nakka Kondiah N^o 67749 shouted to them not to go, I again spoke to them and they said they wanted to bring their women and children in to avoid trouble I agreed to this they all collected on a piece of vacant ground situate between the Offices and the Compound and Samuel an Indian who spoke in English said "we will not go into Umzinto as the Police will beat us". Sergeant Davidson replied and said "The Police will not beat you and you can take plenty of time and walk quietly along the road". The women at this time moved away towards the rooms and an Indian Sheik Peir shouted something in his own language and sat down on the ground and struck the ground with his open hand a few times, jumped up and threw himself flat on his back and lay there, most of the other men followed his example but some at the back of the crowd did not do so, until some of the men who were already lying down jumped up and spoke to them in a threatening manner and they then sat down. Indian Sheik Peir then spoke in Kaffir and drew his hand across his throat, I order the Police to loose their horses quietly towards them but not to harm them in any

²⁶ Gandhi was to repeat his praise of Campbell as see *Ibid.*, p.433.

way as we moved towards them I heard someone shout "A horse is killed"...²⁷

The ensuing confrontation left two strikers dead and another ten suffering bullet wounds.

The 1913 strike was an event which employers could look upon as a disruption, but more than that as a time after which Indian workers would avoid field work on an ever-increasing scale. From that time the number of Indian sugar workers began shrinking more rapidly than it had been doing,²⁸ and those Indian workers remaining in the industry tended to become concentrated in sugarmill work or overseer positions in the cane fields.

First Manifestations of Industrial Action: 1914-late 1930s

The first major strike involving sugar workers after 1913 did indeed constitute industrial action. This strike occurred during 1918 at the northern-most sugarmill in Natal, St. Lucia Sugar Co.'s Umfolozi sugarmill. (See Table 14.) Although far from Durban, and not dependent on Indian workers, the Umfolozi sugarmill was not an unlikely site for a strike as sugar workers in northern Zululand have always been the lowest paid. According to the official evidence, all 260 African workers at the Umfolozi sugarmill went out at 7 a.m. on 25th September 1918, demanding that their monthly wages be increased from £2 to £3. When,

²⁷ TAD, GG 898, Rourke to Trew, no date. The Beneva incident was also reported in the **Report of the Indian Enquiry Commission of 1914**.

²⁸ In the early 1900s approximately 90% of all sugarmill workers were Indians, the figure for 1903 having been 89,9% of the total of 7449 (**Statistical Year Book for 1903**). Just over a decade after the strike, in 1926, Indians constituted 45,9% of all 7711 sugarmill workers and Africans 46,3% (Board of Trade and Industries, Report No 66, **Report on the Sugar Industry, 1926**). By 1935 Indians constituted 34,9% of all 9145 sugarmill workers and Africans 52,8%; while 3908 Indians were employed by millers-cum-planters as field workers (SASJ 19:4(1935), pp.201-203). See also Chapter 5 Note 104.

TABLE 14: STRIKES/"DISPUTES INVOLVING WORK STOPPAGES" 1918-1954

	SUGARMILL/ LOCATION	DURATION	NO OF WORKERS INVOLVED	
			BLACK	WHITE
1918	Umfolozi		260	
1919	Felixton			
1920	Refineries			
:				
:				
1932	Zululand	3 days		
:				
:				
1935	Inanda	1 day	51	
1936	New Guelderland	1 day	96	
1937	Illovo	2 days	31	
:				
:				
1942		5 strikes		
:				
:				
1945	Glendale: Settlement of dispute by arbitration			
1946	Illovo	3 days	65	
:				
:				
1948	Illovo	2 days	60	
:				
:				
1952	Refinery	28 hours	847	
:				
:				
1954	Umfolozi	2½ hours		22

Sources: Department of Labour, Annual Reports; *Natal Mercury*; H G Ringrose, *Trade Unions in Natal*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1951; *South African Sugar Journal*.

about an hour later, the demand was reportedly raised to £4, the manager warned the striking workers that he was calling in the police. The magistrate at Empangeni was sent a telegram, and a sergeant with four constables were dispatched to Umfolozi. The narrative is taken up by the sergeant, in his report to his commanding officer in Eshowe:

Shortly after [the telegram was sent to the magistrate] the Natives...thought better of it and returned to work. There were no untoward incidents, nor damage to property threatened, it being simply a case of passive resistance as far as it went. No previous trouble has been experienced, nor were any grievances put forward.

I arrived at the Mill at 5 p.m. just as the Natives were ceasing work for the day, and had everyone of them gathered together and addressed them. I thoroughly explained to them the provisions of the Masters and Servants Act...

I think that these Natives must have been stirred up by some agitators either from the Rand or Durban, but up to the present I cannot trace any of them. There have been none at the Mill to the knowledge of the Compound Manager or any of the Mill officials, but still there may be some working amongst the Natives.

I do not think that there will be any further trouble, at any rate, for the present, I have left a couple of good N.C.s [Native Constables] there to watch events and make guarded enquiries for the next few days.²⁹

The following week the sergeant reported to the magistrate, tenaciously pursuing his hypothesis that the workers had not struck of their own volition:

the 2 Native Constables alluded to...have returned to day and report that the Natives are working well and that there has been no further trouble.

The O.C. sent me a detective (Native) who has been sent to the Mill to endeavour to trace the cause and origin of the late strike, as we are anxious to ascertain if possible, whether there are any Native agitators from the Rand or Durban at the bottom of this trouble.³⁰

The Umfolozi strike was ill-fated, and within a month over 100 of the frustrated workers whose demands had not been met deserted the sugarmill.³¹

²⁹ NAD, CNC 1918/33, Rumbelow to OCC Eshowe, no date.

³⁰ NAD, CNC 1918/33, Rumbelow to Empangeni Magistrate, 2.10.1918.

³¹ NAD, CNC 1918/33, Empangeni Magistrate to Chief Native Commissioner, 24.10.1918.

Towards the end of 1919, over a year after the Umfolozi strike, Felixton sugarmill's crane drivers and those in charge of the cane carrier struck for higher wages and against certain conditions of work.³² There were signs that a modicum of organisation had underpinned this strike, which may have reflected the growing threat to white semi-skilled workers' job tenure as employers seized opportunities to replace them with Indian workers. It is significant in this context that employers were eager to curb organisation amongst white workers, and that Tongaat's owners had been given cause to praise all but 6 white employees who resigned from their union rather than from the company when the union demanded certain wage minima that were to be paid at an hourly rate.³³ There was nothing remarkable about the relatively acquiescent behaviour of white sugarmill workers. As the SASJ's editor was to observe, "the true proletariat of South Africa are black and coloured men, and the real aristocrats seem to be the artisans".³⁴ The artisanate of the sugarmill was small, and even if the aristocracy of sugarmill labour was inclusive of semi-skilled white workers it did not exceed 10% of the total workforce. This small stratum occupied the most privileged positions in the sugarmill's occupational hierarchy.

As some white sugarmill workers were resigning from their union, black sugarmill workers were doing just the opposite. From the mid-1920s responses by black sugarmill workers acquired a new dynamic inasmuch as they were, in certain localised instances, guided by strong organisational influences. While at a structural level the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act had given organised Indian but not African

³² In its limited coverage of the strike the SASJ reported that a sugar workers' union was in operation on the coast (SASJ 3:12(1919), p.895).

³³ Condenser 5:5(1967), p.3.

³⁴ SASJ 15:6(1931), pp.359-361.

workers the possibility of gaining union recognition, both sectors of the black working class in Natal reacted positively, albeit regionally and unevenly, to organisational appeals. Endeavours to rally the collective sympathies of black workers in Natal were made by the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICU) and, since 1930, its break-away faction the ICU **yase** Natal, on the one hand, and by the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) on the other hand.

Although the ICU had gained considerable support amongst Africans since the time of its establishment in Natal in 1924 (many of those supporters in Durban having also joined the CPSA when it opened a branch in the city in 1929), from 1930 the break-away ICU **yase** Natal had rapidly lost ground in Natal, largely to the advantage of the CPSA.³⁵ The sugarocrats were surely keen observers of the changing fortunes of both the ICU and the CPSA in Natal, and from close quarters at that. It was in J.L.Hulett's house that Clements Kadalie obtained official permission to hold the first ICU meeting in Durban in 1924;³⁶ and A.W.G.Champion, as the secretary of the ICU in Natal, clashed with L.C.Grice (see Chapter 1, "The Sugarocracy's Consorts"), as employers' representative, before securing the appointment of a Wages Board on behalf of Durban's African workers in 1925.³⁷

Both Helen Bradford and Shula Marks have discussed the issues surrounding William Campbell's connivance in mounting an indirect attack on the ICU in 1927 through the agency of his acquaintances Solomon, the paramount Royal Zulu, and John Dube. After Dube had spoken at Campbell's invitation, and in Solomon's presence, to a thousand workers

³⁵ E.Roux, **Time Longer than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa**. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964, pp.222 and 245-246.

³⁶ C.Kadalie, **My Life and the ICU**. London: Frank Cass, 1970, p.64.

³⁷ **The Truth about the ICU**. Durban: African Workers' Club, 1927, p.22.

at Mount Edgecombe,³⁸ he augmented his verbal condemnation of Champion and the ICU in his newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal*.³⁹

While it is clear that Champion had a following amongst workers along the sugar belt,⁴⁰ it is equally apparent that sugarmillers (and growers) did not take kindly to the ICU's presence.⁴¹ But if employers in the sugar industry had been anxious enough about the ICU's advances to have deemed obstructive tactics necessary,⁴² then the ascendancy of the CPSA as a political umbrella organisation must have been a particularly bitter pill for them to swallow.

Since 1935, but especially after the 1937 strike at the Durban Falkirk Iron Company's foundry, the organisation of black industrial workers in Natal was spearheaded by members of the CPSA.⁴³ This did not augur well

³⁸ H. Bradford, "The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930". PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, p.148.

³⁹ *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12.8.1927. I am grateful to Shula Marks for first having alerted me to the existence of this particular comment by Dube.

⁴⁰ As early as 1925 the ICU had convened a meeting "at Zululand" (Forman, BC 581, B1.5, Notice of ICU Executive Committee, c.6.10.1925); and by 1929 there was certainly an ICU branch in Stanger (Forman, BC 581, B5.35, A.W.G.Champion to R.A.Mdima, 23.7.1929). The sugar belt was however not an ICU stronghold and "at no stage obtained a sufficient grip...to organize protest over existing conditions" (H. Bradford, "The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in the Natal Countryside: Class Struggle on the Land". Hons. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1980, p.50).

⁴¹ Bradford, "Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in the South African Countryside". p.198.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.148 and 372. Incidentally, despite the relatively milder position of the ICU *yase Natal*, the Natal break-away faction of the ICU (as suggested by Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, pp.245-246), the ICU *yase Natal*, like the South African Native National Congress, was unlikely to have been looked upon kindly by sugarmillers, even if Albert Luthuli had been admitted as the first African representative on the sugar industry's Central Board (A.Luthuli, *Let My People Go*. London: Collins, 1962, pp.65-70), and the Campbells were on amicable terms with John Dube (see Chapter 2). See also S.Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906-8 Disturbances in Natal*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, pp.54 and 358-365.

⁴³ Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*. pp.250-252 and 330-331.

for the sugarmillers. Towards the end of the 1930s, in 1937, the NSIEU was constituted and registered as a union of Indian sugarmill workers, with a "parallel" but officially unrecognised African section. Inspired by tireless organisers, including some of the first Indian members of the CPSA, such as H.A.Naidoo and G.Ponnen,⁴⁴ the NSIEU represented an "infiltration" of the sugar industry by "outsiders", and communists at that.

The birth of the NSIEU, at the very time that labour-saving entered into the sugarmillers' thinking, was a significant event. However its sphere of influence over sugarmill workers was limited on two counts: the NSIEU did not have a large base of members in the sugarmills, and it did not represent the only device by means of which sugarmill workers sought to eliminate the pangs of the general economic climate and related pressures upon them at the point of production.

Labour-saving meant different things to different people in the sugar industry. When two of Doornkop sugarmill's African workers had stood trial in mid-1937 for malicious injury to property (by putting fire to company cane), the court found *inter alia*

Dissatisfaction among employees...as a result of alteration of conditions of employment.

Ill feeling on part of malcontents against those employees who had accepted the new terms.

Rumour current amongst employees that those refusing the new terms would be dismissed.

On 20/5/37 twenty five acres of cane on the estates were burnt.

As a result of the fire the Mill started crushing immediately and, as all employees were needed for the extra work thus entailed, none of the malcontents were dismissed.⁴⁵

One of the accused was acquitted, the other convicted. The latter

⁴⁴ K.Luckhardt and B.Wall, **Organize...or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions**. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980, p.78.

⁴⁵ NAD, Lower Tugela Magisterial Archives, Criminal Case 1431 of 1937.

worker, an induna in the sugarmill, had refused to accept the lengthening of the working month by the company. His ingenious act of resistance was representative of the spontaneous responses which were to persist in the sugarmills despite the existence of the NSIEU.

Some two years after the conviction of the Doornkop induna, 9 of Felixton sugarmill's African workers, including 3 from Mozambique, were charged and convicted for inciting 76 of their African colleagues to withhold their labour. The charges arose out of the refusal by an entire shift of African workers to work one night early in June 1939 unless their wages of £2 per month were increased. Despite appeals from the manager and the compound manager, in the presence of a contingent of police, the workers stood fast and the sugarmill had to be closed down for the night.⁴⁶ As in the case of the Doornkop "malcontents", Felixton's African workers were the losers in their attempt to contest the **status quo** in the sugarmill. Though the list of such defeats was to grow, it was in these sorts of action by workers at specific sugarmills that the limited reach of the NSIEU continued to be shown up.

An important factor which accounted for the NSIEU's limited organisational strength was that from the outset its work was hampered by employers. Union meetings were prohibited on company property, and clandestine meetings were constantly under threat of disruption by armed intimidators.⁴⁷ Consequently, during the early years of the NSIEU's existence, its officials travelled long distances to remain in touch with workers while obviating the victimisation that was expected if

⁴⁶ NAD, Lower Umfolozi Magisterial Archives, Criminal Case 568 of 1939.

⁴⁷ Luckhardt and Wall, **Organize or Starve**. p.78.

local stewards were appointed.⁴⁸ The Union's Secretary, H.A.Naidoo, nevertheless appears to have been extraordinarily optimistic about its potential.

With claims to a following of a mere 25 sugarmill and refinery workers, Naidoo's contribution to the 1938 South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC) Conference nevertheless revolved almost entirely on the position of field workers. Three resolutions came of this concern: the conference delegates called on the SATLC's Durban Local Committee to investigate the position of field workers; a call was made for a Wage Board inquiry into field work; and a motion was adopted to tackle the "unorganised position of the rural districts".⁴⁹ When M.Diamond represented the NSIEU at the 1939 SATLC Conference, his main concern was the way in which the Factories Act was being violated by sugarmillers who expected a 12-hour working day of their employees without providing lunch breaks or rest rooms.⁵⁰ The issues which they injected into the SATLC's meetings may have given the impression that the NSIEU's organisers occupied themselves solely with "global" questions, but, as they were to demonstrate when they locked horns with the sugarocracy in 1941, this was not the case.

Confronting the Sugarocracy: late 1930s-1962

Undaunted by structural difficulties and employers' attempts to stifle organisation, the NSIEU went ahead to achieve its first victory in 1941 as a result of its successful bid to have the Department of Labour conduct an investigation into the conditions facing sugarmill workers.

⁴⁸ H.G.Ringrose, **Trade Unions in Natal**. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1951, p.73.

⁴⁹ TUCSA, AH 646, Da 1.8, Minutes of 8th Annual SATLC Conference, 1938.

⁵⁰ TUCSA, AH 646, Da 1.9, Minutes of 9th Annual SATLC Conference, 1939.

The outcome of the investigation was in itself an important achievement, as was shown in Chapter 4, but more importantly, it led to significant wage increases and other material benefits for black workers. The NSIEU's achievements in 1941 demonstrated quite vividly to the employers that concerted and organised worker action had indeed come to the Natal sugar industry.

With war-time inflation steadily eroding the value of their wages, black sugarmill workers began early in 1941 to express discontent with their material condition. The 1941 dispute began on 23rd January of that year, when the NSIEU and the SATLC jointly requested, through Natal's Divisional Inspector of Labour, that a meeting be convened at which workers' representatives and sugarmillers might discuss wages and other conditions in the industry. Employers declined.⁵¹ As the NSIEU had so far acted constitutionally at every stage, the government appointed a Conciliation Board on 3rd June. By the end of July the Conciliation Board, having not settled the dispute, adopted a resolution that neither further negotiation nor arbitration would lead to a settlement.⁵²

On Wednesday 20th August the NSIEU held an organisational meeting at Clairwood which was attended by about 250 African workers and 35 Indian workers.⁵³ Natal's Inspector of Labour met with the ten sugarmillers concerned on Friday 22nd August, when the employers agreed to settle subject to any wage determination being made effective from no earlier a date than 1st September. On the following evening the NSIEU held a general meeting attended by some 250 African workers and 150 Indian workers, most of them from Hulsar. The next day an executive meeting

⁵¹ TAD, ARB 583, NSIEU Secretary to Sugarmillers, 7.3.1941.

⁵² TAD, ARB 583, Conciliation Board to Minister of Labour, 22.7.1941.

⁵³ TAD, ARB 583, Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner of Police, 30.8.1941.

was held at which the NSIEU turned down the sugarmillers' proposal.⁵⁴ Apart from the meetings held that week-end, there was a strike of 150 African workers at the Renishaw sugarmill.⁵⁵ The NSIEU persuaded the striking workers to resume work and await the outcome of a strike ballot to be held at a general meeting of sugarmill and refinery workers planned for the 30th August at Temple Hall, in Sirdar Road, Clairwood. The strike ballot meeting was to be held in the event of a failure by employers to act, before that date, to settle the workers' grievances. The demands that workers had made were for a 10/- per month increase, for improved quarters and rations, and for the recognition of the NSIEU by employers.

On Monday 25th August employers made the offer of 10/- per month to male adults and 5/- to women and youths employed at Hulsar, in Durban, and a 5/- per month increase to all sugarmill (i.e. rural) workers. At an NSIEU meeting that night the urban/rural differential embodied in this offer was rejected, and the demand for a 10/- increase all round was repeated.

On Tuesday 26th August a meeting of 600 sugarmill workers at Mount Edgecombe showed them to be unanimously agreed on the need for strike action. At one of the Hulett's sugarmills, Darnall, workers had been offered general increases, but the NSIEU and that sugarmill's workers stood opposed to the differentiation of workers in this way. These latter workers also refused to negotiate directly with Hulett's, demanding that recognition be given to the NSIEU.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ TAD, ARB 583, Natal Divisional Inspector to Secretary for Labour, 26.8.1941.

⁵⁵ Natal Mercury 27.8.1941.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

On Thursday 28th August employers' and workers' representatives met to discuss the workers' grievances, their demand for an increased and uniform rate of pay for the entire industry, and a revision of hours of work. It was agreed to hold another meeting at which the Conciliation Board would be re-assembled.

On Friday 29th August the Conciliation Board met. The Board had not been officially disbanded since its appointment in June, and it was still empowered to arbitrate in the ongoing dispute. This meeting was also adjourned until the following day, with the stalemate between employers and workers unbroken.

On Saturday 30th August the dispute entered an even more critical stage. The meeting that day of the Conciliation Board closed with a decision to await the arrival in Durban of I. Walker, the Department of Labour's Secretary, to mediate in the dispute. The **Natal Mercury** had reported "signs of truculence" amongst Esperanza's workers, the position at Renishaw was no less tense, and the NSIEU was hard put to restrain workers from striking.⁵⁷ Thus when more than 400 workers met as planned in Clairwood to decide on a course of action, NSIEU officials had to go to great lengths to convince them that because the issue was now **sub judice**, strike action would be illegal and therefore inadvisable.⁵⁸

On Tuesday 2nd September the **Natal Mercury** contained an editorial on the dispute which was broadly sympathetic with the workers. The article also intimated that Walker might exercise the powers conferred upon him as Controller of Manpower, under the war-time Emergency Regulations, to end the dispute. Inflamed by the thought of this possibility, the NSIEU

⁵⁷ **Natal Mercury** 1.9.1941.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

reacted immediately. With the prospect of official high-handedness threatening the striking workers' cause, the NSIEU's Secretary wrote to the Minister of Labour, warning that

Thousands of workers involved in the present dispute, living under conditions that can only be described as a scandal and disgrace to any civilised country, certainly will not tolerate any arbitrarily imposed terms of settlement when they have fully conformed with every legal requirement in terms of the Industrial Council (sic) Act.⁵⁹

The NSIEU had reportedly voiced strong opposition to the creation of the post of Controller of Manpower, and it was not now going to stand for the collective bargaining process to be short-circuited.⁶⁰

The NSIEU's misgivings were obviously assuaged, because on Wednesday 10th September employers' and workers' representatives agreed to allow Walker to mediate and to leave it to him to settle the dispute. His settlement would be binding until the first Wage Determination. Had the settlement failed sugarmill workers would undoubtedly have gone out on strike regardless of anything the NSIEU might have suggested. They knew that they would have had the backing of the Non-European United Front, which a week before Walker's arrival had already begun preparing a memorandum calling on all black workers in Natal to come out in active support for the sugarmill workers in the event of such a failure.⁶¹ As it happened, the workers found Walker's settlement of 10/- to all adult male workers and 5/- to women and youths, without urban/rural differentiation, to be acceptable.

With the 1941 victory notched up, the NSIEU's status as a sugarmill workers' union was confirmed. The Union's officials could not be

⁵⁹ Quoted in *Daily News* 2.9.1941.

⁶⁰ *Natal Mercury* 3.9.1941.

⁶¹ *Natal Mercury* 5.9.1941.

complacent in their victory for, as Naidoo made clear during the 1942 SATLC Conference, sugarmillers had not let up in their campaign to obstruct organisation. Naidoo spoke of the various implications of the employers' campaign; of how attempts were made to "break" the Union by "an off-loading of labour on to the fields", of widespread dismissals, and of discrimination against workers who were "interested in the Union".⁶² These revelations were voiced in support of the motion passed at the Conference

That the Government be requested to amend its industrial laws for the purpose of including such agricultural workers as are engaged in the sugar industry and in agricultural co-operations.⁶³

Not surprisingly, this call came to nothing, but the fundamental matter in question did not escape the attention of the sugarmillers. The **SASJ** conveyed it to them in a parabolic editorial:

Let us take an instance of the ill effects of differing wage scales within the industry as a whole. In a lodging on a sugar estate are two brothers. One is a worker in the fields, the other an unskilled worker in a mill. There is a disparity between the wages received by each. The agricultural labourer, who is beyond the pale of wage legislation, receives only one-half of the wages received by his brother in the factory. There comes discussion, explanation, argument; and in the end, smarting from apparent injustice under which the one is paternally cared for by the Government, the other foments insurrection and, with the vigour of a fanatic, breeds among his like a strike and civil disobedience.⁶⁴

The **SASJ**'s editor was to be proved not far off the mark with his premonition about the field worker,⁶⁵ but his message was not heeded by the sugarmillers. As Naidoo opined during 1943, employers were unlikely

⁶² TUCSA, AH 646, Da 1.12, Report of 12th Annual SATLC Conference, 1942.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ **SASJ** 26:9(1942), p.431.

⁶⁵ When the Natal Sugar Field Workers' Union was launched in the mid-1940s its first concerns were to struggle to have field workers recognised under the Industrial Conciliation Act, and for improved wages (TUCSA, AH 646, Dd 7.3, Memorandum from NSFVU to Prime Minister Smuts, no date; TUCSA, AH 646, Dd 17.57, NSFVU Constitution, no date; and **Ambag** 2:3(1946), pp.11-12, 2:6(1946), p.15, and 2:10(1946), p.22).

to alter the prevailing conditions except possibly under the pressure of a strike.⁶⁶ As Naidoo was to witness at Glendale over the following months, some employers would go to great lengths to preserve the **status quo**, and even the threat of a strike was not a certain means of bringing about reform.

Of the local disputes that took place in the aftermath of the 1941 victory, that between the NSIEU and Glendale Sugar Estate was particularly significant. The 1941 award had only applied to workers employed in the 9 sugarmills and refinery whose various owners were represented on the relevant Conciliation Board. This had left workers at the remaining 13 sugarmills unaffected by the award. Such differentiation reflected the regional pattern of the NSIEU's membership at the time: the Union was registered in the contiguous magisterial districts of Durban, Pinetown, Umzinto, Inanda, and Lower Tugela, and the 6 smallest and most peripheral sugarmills within those districts had no workers who were NSIEU members. Sugarmills embraced by the terms of the award each had more than 100 workers enrolled as NSIEU members, and only one of the 13 unaffected sugarmills, namely Melville, had some of its workers organised by the Union. (See Table 15.) Glendale was one of the sugarmills falling within a district where the Union was registered, but which at the time had no workers in the NSIEU. Although Glendale, under the ownership of the Paruk family, stood outside the sphere of actual sugarocratic control, its protracted dispute with the NSIEU, between mid-1943 and early 1945, involved issues and personnel that were subsequently to emerge within the sugarocracy's sugarmills.

The Glendale dispute had its origins in July 1943, as the sugarmill was

⁶⁶ TUCSA, AH 646, Da 1.13, Report of the 13th Annual SATLC Conference, 1943.

TABLE 15: MEMBERSHIP OF THE NATAL SUGAR INDUSTRY
EMPLOYEES' UNION, 1941

SUGARMILLS	RACIAL DIVISION OF LABOUR				NSIEU MEMBERSHIP (Indians and Africans)
	WHITE	"MAURITIAN"	AFRICAN	INDIAN	
Chaka's Kraal	30	11	430	136	114
Gledhow	33	-	168	149	129
Renishaw	24	-	175	150	166
Illovo	36	9	165	185	303
Esperanza	51	5	279	177	117
Sezela	74	-	393	318	276
Mt Edgecombe	166	-	550	742	526
Hulsar	139	-	590	302	271
Tongaat	75	-	300	255	243
Darnall	328	-	900	215	196
Glendale	6	-	45	43	-
Melville	27	-	257	106	88
Doornkop	13	-	241	54	-
New Guelderland	16	6	181	74	-
Central Factory	33	-	160	140	-
Prospecton	6	-	20	56	-
Umzinkulu	12	-	153	87	-
Shire's	-	-	45	-	-
Felixton	54	-	500	63	-
Amatikulu	54	-	450	105	-
Entumeni	8	-	208	57	-
Z S M	73	-	510	115	-
Umfolozi	99	-	725	28	-
	1 357	31	7 545	3 557	2 429

Source: TAD, ARB 583, LL 1052/260, Divisional Inspector to
Secretary for Labour, 22.9.1941.

about to begin its annual crushing season.⁶⁷ A meeting had been scheduled for that month, at which NSIEU officials were to have started organising and recruiting Glendale workers. Inclement weather prevented the meeting from being held. The NSIEU learnt that 10 workers who had congregated in the hope of attending the meeting were soon thereafter withdrawn from the sugarmill by its management, and put to work in the company's cane fields. Nevertheless, by the end of August the majority of Glendale's workers, who were eligible for membership, had joined the NSIEU. During the next two months, September and October, four more sugarmill workers, including two shop stewards, were re-allocated to tasks outside the sugarmill. Then during December, at the end of the crushing season, 18 sugarmill workers were not made the conventional offer of off-crop work in the sugarmill or as field labourers, and they and their families were instructed to vacate the company's living quarters. The NSIEU intervened and believed it had succeeded in having the management give these people a reprieve until alternative accommodation had been found. To the Union's surprise, these workers were subsequently arrested and jailed for trespassing. The NSIEU again intervened to secure their release, and the Union arranged accommodation for them until the beginning of the 1944 crushing season, when they were to apply to resume work at Glendale. However, before the new season started in June 1944 they were informed that the sugarmill had its full complement of workers, and that they were unwanted.

The NSIEU was to discover that even after the season had begun more workers were being recruited, including some from Nyasaland and Mozambique, and that with the inception of three shifts, the sugarmill's labour needs were higher than they had ever been. Furthermore, workers

⁶⁷ The story of the Glendale dispute has been reconstructed from correspondence contained in TAD, ARB 598, LC 1052/416, 1944; and TAD, ARB 1573, 1183/12-31, 1944.

who were employed had reported to the NSIEU that sirdars and the factory manager had threatened to dismiss any who joined the union or had contact with its secretary. The situation was exacerbated by claims to the effect that the factory manager had publicly boasted of having destroyed the NSIEU at Glendale. Workers then held a meeting where demands were formulated for submission to the management.

On 26th July the NSIEU demanded Glendale to recognise the Union and a local union committee of 4 members, and to re-instate the 18 workers who had been dismissed at the end of the previous season. Although management acknowledged recognition of the NSIEU "as it is entitled to by law", Glendale refused to submit to the demands. When, as a consequence of this refusal, Shanley, who had succeeded Naidoo as the NSIEU's Secretary in 1943, contacted one of Glendale's directors in Durban, Suleman Paruk, it was intimated that the company would stand fast, fully prepared to cope with a strike of two months duration if it had to. Shanley responded with the warning that the NSIEU could sustain a strike until the end of the season, whereupon Paruk suggested resorting to a ministerially-appointed Conciliation Board. Before calling for the constitution of such a Board, a final attempt was made to resolve the issue internally. This attempt met with failure because the factory manager, J.B. Grant, who was entrusted by the Glendale directorate to act on behalf of the company, regarded the affair as non-negotiable. A meeting of workers on 31st July resolved to apply for a Conciliation Board, and in the event of the Minister of Labour's failure to comply with the request, to go out on strike.

Because the sugar industry fell under the provisions of War Measure N°9 of 1942, the Minister of Labour recommended the appointment of an

arbitrator to settle the Glendale dispute. There was a lengthy delay in the making of this appointment, one of the prospective arbitrators having died and others having been otherwise committed. Meanwhile, it was reported by Shanley, in a letter written to the Minister of Labour early in September 1944, that Grant was "commencing to adopt a bold attitude once again", that four more workers had been dismissed, and that the company was "visciously anti-union and ruthless. They will stop at nothing". During November Shanley communicated to the Minister the NSIEU's views on the urgent need for the appointment of an arbitrator, and referred again to continuing dismissals, to the management's not having "wasted any time in intimidating and terrorising the employees at Glendale", and to the resultant fear amongst workers to deal with NSIEU officials except at a point that was 2 miles from company premises.

An arbitrator's award was finally made in mid-March 1945, which compelled Glendale to recognise and co-operate with an NSIEU shop steward and a local complaints committee; and complaints procedures were set out. The award was to be effective for one year.

The Glendale dispute essentially revolved around the questions of union recognition and worker representation. The role played by owners and management during the dispute was no different in its objectives and methods from that played by other sugarmillers in Natal under circumstances where workers were trying to organise or where they collectively sought union recognition. Small sugarmillers and sugarocrats alike were intent on deflecting the new-found organisational energies of black workers.

The registration of the Industrial Council for the Sugar Manufacturing

and Refining Industry in May 1947 did not ameliorate the circumstances within which the NSIEU operated. Consensus was far from being reached on wage rates when the first Industrial Council "agreement" was adopted in mid-1947, and there followed negotiations between the NSIEU and the Department of Labour in the absence of the employers (who refused to meet with the Union officials).⁶⁸ Not only were they shunned by employers, but the NSIEU's officials sensed mounting organisational difficulties as Indian semi-skilled workers were systematically being replaced by Africans. Because Africans, who already outnumbered the 3000 Indians 2:1 in the sugarmills, were housed in compounds they were relatively inaccessible to NSIEU organisers.⁶⁹

No more than a few days had passed since the NSIEU's officials had lamented the fact that the compound represented an obstacle to organisation when, on the 2nd November 1947, 500 African sugarmill workers at Darnall went on strike to demonstrate their objections to compound discipline and to demand the dismissal of the compound manager and a number of company policemen. These workers, about half of whom came from Mozambique, were reported by the **Daily News** to have returned to work after 15 hours following an address by the police captain who had travelled from Durban with 30 other policemen to deal with the strike.⁷⁰ Shanley offered a corrective to the newspaper report, stating that the brutality of the police and the consequent hospitalisation of some workers had been neglected.⁷¹

Darnall's workers were evidently quite competent to organise and act

⁶⁸ TUCSA, AH 646, Da 4.4, Minutes of SATLC Durban and District Local Executive Committee Meetings, June 1947 and August 1947.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, October 1947.

⁷⁰ **Daily News** 3.11.1947.

⁷¹ TUCSA, AH 646, Da 4.4, Minutes of SATLC Durban and District Local Executive Committee Meeting, November 1947.

collectively around a specific grievance, but it was clear that they did not command sufficient resources to be able to defy police (or employers') instructions and sustain a strike until their demands were met. Nor did the NSIEU offer an effective means of pressing African sugarmill workers' demands. The Union's officials saw themselves as being hamstrung by structural conditions. As the SATLC, relaying a report from Shanley, portrayed those conditions in September 1948:

Under present circumstances we have to go to the Employers for permission to hold meetings because there are no facilities for holding meetings elsewhere than on the Estates.

The Industrial Council...is functioning very well and it was not proposed to do anything to upset the Employers by holding meetings on private property without permission.

Naturally the Employers do not want us to go against Government policy and consequently there is a lot of confusion on the question of the status of the African workers.

The Employers take up the stand that until the Government gives definite expression to its policy towards the African workers they are not going to do anything.⁷²

A decade earlier they had been bold and optimistic organisers, but since the formation of the Industrial Council, the NSIEU's officials seemed to have become cautious if not somewhat diffident.

Given its highly centralised organisational structure - a handful of Durban-based officials acting as policy-makers, organisers, and negotiators - the NSIEU had during and since its 1941 struggle found it difficult to contain workers' militancy in those sugarmills where it had members. By now virtually deferring to employers so as not to jeopardise its position within the Industrial Council, the NSIEU was effectively (but probably quite unintentionally) announcing to African sugarmill workers in particular that it could promise them little besides what it said in the Council which was in their interests. Yet

⁷² Ibid., September 1948.

within the Industrial Council, the NSIEU's own voice was stifled as a result of its officials' inability to penetrate the barriers erected by the sugarmillers.

Despite its problems, the NSIEU had made considerable headway during its first decade, and by 1948 it could boast a membership of 2742 Indian workers and an additional 1520 workers in its African section.⁷³ But when the time came in mid-1949 to negotiate a new Industrial Council agreement, the representatives of these more than 4000 sugarmill workers felt obliged to withdraw from the Council. Early in the negotiations a dead-lock was reached between the employers on the one hand, and the NSIEU and the AEU on the other, over the definition of job categories in mechanical work (*viz.* those applying to artisans, handymen, and assistants or "hands"). The position deteriorated when the NSIEU withdrew from the Council; its decision to do so having been occasioned by the employers' denial of recognition to the Union and its appointed shop stewards, and their refusal to make provision in the agreement for the collection of union subscriptions by stop order.⁷⁴ Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the new agreement represented significant gains for white sugarmill workers (such as having an end put to the employers' practices of lowering shift engineers' wages during the off-crop and charging rental for company houses, and being assured that "the status of 'artisan' will not be interfered with").⁷⁵ The Industrial Council agreement had thus reinforced the material connotations of the racial division of sugarmill labour.

Material differentiation within the context of the racial division of

⁷³ Ringrose, *Trade Unions.*, pp.107-110.

⁷⁴ TUCSA, AH 646, Da 4.4, Minutes of SATLC Durban and District Local Executive Committee Meetings, July 1949 and September 1949.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, September 1949.

sugarmill labour accounted for the fact that virtually every strike by sugarmill workers was an ethnically exclusive affair. It would be facile to put this down to the racial division of sugarmill labour alone; and equally simplistic to attribute it entirely to ethnic identity. The bloody 1949 clash in Durban between Indians and Zulus might be used to argue that ethnic identity cannot be altogether discounted as a vital aspect of workers' responses along ethnic lines at that time. To the degree that ethnic identity did exist amongst sugarmill workers, it was underpinned by the legal (and thus material) differentials between Indians and Africans - different rights to property, different rights as workers, spatial segregation, and the social division of labour according to "racial" criteria. It is perhaps not surprising then that although by the late 1940s the NSIEU had organised almost one-third of all sugarmill workers in Natal, its success had not resulted in the elimination of "ethnic responses" to the sugarmilling labour process. And certainly the schism between black and white sugarmill workers remained as deep as ever.

That the consequences of the "ethnicity" factor in industrial sugar workers' responses could themselves reinforce divisions amongst black sugar company employees was made apparent at the Hulsar refinery during December 1952. On the 16th December, the 300 African refinery workers on the first shift downed tools. They demanded that their wages be raised above the levels set by the Wage Determination a decade past, and they requested overalls and other benefits. Hulsar was given 24 hours to accede to these demands. When the **Daily News** appeared that afternoon it reported that 20 Indian workers on the first shift had been warned to join the strike "or be killed".⁷⁶ After the striking African workers

⁷⁶ **Daily News** 16.12.1952.

returned to their compound, where the second shift also remained that afternoon, the refinery's centrifugals and driers were kept in operation by white artisans and Indian workers.⁷⁷

On the following morning the striking workers, now numbering 800 and including a very small number of Indians, met on the Hulsar sports field with directors of the company and officials from the Departments of Labour and Native Affairs. After informing them of their instant dismissal, the Hulsar director Sulin refused to speak to the workers' representative declaring that the "indaba was over".⁷⁸ With 40 armed police standing by the workers were told that they were expected by the employers to collect their pay and, after spending the night in the compound, to either re-enlist with or leave Hulsar the next morning. Although they initially refused to take their pay, they did so the next morning and by the afternoon half of the workers had been reinstated.⁷⁹

During the Hulsar strike, but behind the scenes, the NSIEU's Shanley communicated with the Secretary of the Industrial Council first by telephone and then in writing. The Union's central purpose was to dissociate itself from the strike and to seek physical and financial security for Indian workers employed by Hulsar. More than that, the NSIEU wished

to state that naturally their sympathies are with the strikers in their endeavour to obtain by direct means, that which [the] Union has been trying to obtain by peaceful negotiations through your [sic.] Council over the period of the past FOUR years.⁸⁰

Shanley continued to make the telling point that the blame for the

⁷⁷ Ibid. 17.12.1952.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 18.12.1952.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 19 and 20.12.1952.

⁸⁰ TUCSA, AH 646, DC 8.96, E. Shanley to Industrial Council for the Sugar Manufacturing Industry Secretary, 18.12.1952.

strike lay

squarely on the shoulders of the Employers' Association, as this organisation has repeatedly refused to pass on to its lowly paid Employees, a share of the benefits which have accrued to the Industry from the Sugar Price Increases and the improvements in methods.⁸¹

The Hulsar workers, as the only urban industrial sugar workers, and in terms of the Industrial Council agreements, received higher wages than their counterparts in the sugarmills. That the striking Hulsar workers were summarily dismissed pointed to the disjuncture between the ideology and rhetoric of sugarocratic paternalism on the one hand and workers' actual material circumstances on the other. This was a time when the employers' welfarism was gathering momentum, yet improved housing in a number of the sugar villages was not accompanied, in this case, by the provision of overalls or, more significantly, by a more conciliatory approach to protesting workers. It was a time when, as Shanley had written, returns to capital in sugar were expanding, and uninterrupted production took priority over conciliation.

Once the Hulsar strike had been crushed it would be some two decades before the sugarocracy and its corporate heirs would again face serious rebellion. However that is not to say that all sugarmill workers had somehow been pacified, nor is it to say that all sugarmillers-sugarocrats and others alike - went uncontested in their every action towards employees.

An AEU organiser found on one of his routine visits to the sugarmills a few months after the Hulsar strike that white artisans were generally content with their conditions. There were complaints of excessive overtime work at Darnall, but white artisans at ZSM & P "all seemed

⁸¹ Ibid.

happy", ⁸² and Felixton's AEU shop steward conveyed the impression that "members at this Mill seem to be just one big happy family".⁸³ Like all happy families however, sugar villagers had their tribulations. The "double grip" which the employer had over them as boss and landlord could be tightened to an intolerable degree. Then, as happened at Umfolozi late in 1954, workers retaliated in an attempt to release the employers' grip. Twenty one white sugarmill workers retaliated by downing tools when one of their colleagues was dismissed from Umfolozi in connection with an alleged misdemeanour in the social ambit of village life. This victim of social control was dismissed for something unrelated to his work, but his fellow workers found it necessary to use the strike as the only means available to them in trying to redress the issue. The striking workers then felt the might of the employers' grip themselves when they were prosecuted and sentenced to a £10 fine or 2 weeks' "compulsory labour" (half suspended for one year) for their two and a half hour "illegal strike".⁸⁴

As the end of the sugarocratic era approached a period of relative calm set in. There is no evidence of worker militancy between 1954 and 1962 (and for some time thereafter), even when Tongaat reduced by one-fifth its sugarmill's workforce in the face of the 1960 distribution crisis.⁸⁵ The reasons for this apparent lull in collective action are difficult to establish, but some discussion is warranted. What is clear is that organised labour was going through a period of flux and uncertainty. The NSIEU appears to have withdrawn from the SATLC in 1948. Although Shanley, the Union's secretary, had been a member of the CPSA (before

⁸² AEU Monthly Journal and Report 293(April 1954), p.97.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Interview with A.Britz, AEU District Secretary, Durban, 12.9.1985; Ibid. 301(December 1954) and 305(April 1955).

⁸⁵ Tongaat Shareholders' Annual General Meeting, reported in SASJ 44:4(1960).

joining the South African Congress of Democrats), when the SATLC's members re-aligned themselves between 1954 and 1955 the NSIEU, as a "parallel union", followed the course set by the South African Trade Union Council (SATUC) as opposed to that taken by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The SATUC (soon to be named the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA)) represented the more conservative faction to emerge from the SATLC, and it also embraced the AEU which had organised sugarmill artisans. The position adopted by the AEU led to the formal severance of its ties with its parent, the British AEU. The alignment of the NSIEU and the AEU with TUCSA indicated a commitment on their respective parts to "bread-and-butter" negotiations strictly within the ambit of the Industrial Council.

What is unclear is why large-scale spontaneous resistance should have diminished, on the one hand, and why SACTU never organised within the sugar industry on the other hand. The memories of the workers' defeat at Hulsar and harsh repression of political and union activism by the state during the 1950s and early '60s could not have been the sole reasons. It may well be that the NSIEU's older organisers could shed some light on the issue, but the door of the Union's offices is unfortunately closed to all researchers as a matter of principle.

Contesting Institutionalised Capital/Labour Relations: the Post-1962 Period

Professional corporate managers continued to have few problematic capital/labour issues to contend with in the early years of the post-sugarocratic period. The sugar companies' coffers were filled to overflowing by the high revenue of the early 1960s' boom, and welfarism

and material improvements were the order of the day.⁸⁶

Tensions within the capital/labour relationship appeared to be contained by the Industrial Council framework. It was in that framework that white sugarmill workers struggled to no avail to introduce closed-shop agreements,⁸⁷ and within which they intimated that they would move in favour of job reservation if Indians were given artisan training by the sugar companies.⁸⁸ The motives underlying this struggle also led the AEU to dis-affiliate itself in 1966 when TUCSA decided to adopt a non-racial approach to organisation and strategy. As serious as the exclusivist tendencies of white sugarmill workers were (at a time when managers were trying to undo the more constrictive aspects of the sugarocratic legacy),⁸⁹ they were to fall into the shadow cast by black sugarmill workers' militancy which manifested itself in the mid-1970s.

During 1973 Durban and its immediate hinterland experienced widespread strikes. Although the first of these strikes occurred in the Coronation brick and tile plant, a Tongaat subsidiary, the sugar companies were not otherwise touched by the 1973 strikes. Thus sugarmill workers were not involved in the militancy which is now generally regarded as a watershed in South Africa's post-World War II labour history. However a series of strikes by black sugarmill workers during 1974 attested to the fact that they too had entered a new phase of resistance.

⁸⁶ In the early to mid-1960s sugar companies were experiencing high earnings (**Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry of the Republic of South Africa**, 1970), and their newly appointed personnel managers embarked on projects to bring sugarmill workers' conditions up to those which prevailed on the gold mines (Interview with T.Vogel, SASA Personnel Consultant, Durban, 11.9.1985).

⁸⁷ P.L.van den Berghe, **Caneville: The Social Structure of a South African Town**. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964, p.97.

⁸⁸ **Financial Mail** (Special Supplement) 19.2.1965, p.29.

⁸⁹ Interview with Vogel, *op cit.*

In mid-October 1974 about 800 African workers at the Felixton sugarmill went on strike. Felixton's compound manager, P.Boyd, had organised a raid on the compound in search of privately-brewed liquor. Incensed by this attempt at social control, the African workers downed tools and on the night of the 15th October they demonstrated their disapproval by running through the sugarmill waving cane stalks. The following day saw them quietly seated in the compound, with armed police standing by, while the works committee and Department of Labour officials discussed their demand for Boyd's dismissal. The strike ended and work was resumed, after 24 hours, following Hulett's promise that the workers' grievances would be investigated by the company.⁹⁰

Less than a fortnight after the Felixton strike, over 600 black workers struck at the nearby Empangeni sugarmill. After off-duty workers had "rampaged" through the sugarmill, they and their striking colleagues spent the night dancing on the sports field. Without having made specific demands, the striking workers refused the next morning to negotiate with the management through the works committee; they wanted to speak directly to the general manager and the factory manager. After two days the strike ended with the management having accepted a letter from the workers in which they laid out their grievances, but not without tear gas and dogs having also been used by the police to disperse congregated workers and to route them from their compound.⁹¹

A few weeks later, on the morning of 14th November, over 500 African and Indian workers struck for higher wages at the Darnall sugarmill. This was the third of Hulett's five sugarmills to experience a strike within a month and the rapid appearance of police was quite predictable. The

⁹⁰ **Daily News** 16.10.1974 and 18.10.1974. **Natal Mercury** 16.10.1974; 17.10.1974; and 19.10.1974.

⁹¹ **Daily News** 25.10.1974 and 26.10.1974. **Natal Mercury** 26.10.1974.

Daily News reported that the workers were in an "ugly mood",⁹² and an unprecedented step was taken when white women and school students in the village were sent to the whites' recreation hall and kept there under police guard: whether it was Hulett's managers or the police who originally proposed it, it was either a reflection of some deep-seated fear with racist overtones, or it was a signal to the striking workers that the sugarmill had been declared a veritable battlefield. White personnel kept the sugarmill in operation until mid-night, pay packets were prepared, and buses were placed on stand-by to indicate to the striking workers that they faced immediate dismissal. The management promised to investigate grievances expressed at the time that the wage demands were made, and to report back to the workers in a fortnight. This undertaking was accompanied by an ultimatum that workers should return to work or face dismissal. The strike was called off.⁹³

It became quite clear two days later, when about 200 African and Indian workers struck for higher wages at the Melville sugarmill, that the emergent pattern of managerial responses had not deterred workers from confronting their employers outside the Industrial Council. In this case clashes took place between armed police and strikers who had allegedly stoned passing cars on the nearby main road. The strike was broken when workers were threatened with immediate dismissal.⁹⁴

The reaction of the sugar companies to the strikes of October and November 1974 was not simply a display of intransigence. The Felixton strike had arisen out of a specific grievance and Hulett's, although defending the compound manager, was prepared to treat it as a delicate

⁹² **Daily News** 15.11.1974.

⁹³ **Daily News** 15.11.1974. **Natal Mercury** 15.11.1974 and 16.11.1974.

⁹⁴ **Daily News** 18.11.1974. **Natal Mercury** 18.11.1974.

and negotiable affair. However the three subsequent strikes had all the appearances of having been manifestations of what Shanley of the NSIEU had feared would follow the Hulsar strike some two decades previously; namely, the spreading of "the 'Strike Idea'".⁹⁵ Certainly the sugar companies did not treat the latter three strikes as legitimate or justifiable: the employers could ill-afford stoppages at a time when export earnings were extremely high, and in terms of the most recent Industrial Council agreement wages were due to be increased less than six months later. The workers, for their part, had shown how rapidly and effectively they were able to mobilise collectively around an issue which may have seemed to employers to be ill-defined if not indefensible.

In retrospect, the events of late 1974 were the prelude to a revised approach to capital/labour relations by the sugar companies. The transformation took shape after the approval by Parliament of certain of the recommendations made by the Wiehahn Commission in 1979. Three issues in particular characterised the transformation. Firstly, as an extension of their recommendations to the Wiehahn Commission (and in an attempt to contain spontaneous outbursts by sugarmill workers), employers were quick off the mark to sponsor the first trade union for African sugarmill workers. The NUSMRE was launched in 1980 with an employers' subvention, and under the leadership of former works committee functionaries. With its membership of over 4000 in 1980, as opposed to the NSIEU's membership of some 200, the NUSMRE stood for the overwhelming majority of sugarmill workers.⁹⁶ Although it was created as a "sweetheart union", its officials will deny that the employers'

⁹⁵ See Note 80 above.

⁹⁶ S. Miller, *Trade Unions in South Africa, 1970-1980*. Cape Town: SALDRU, 1982, p.190.

subvention has had any bearing on the NUSMRE's work.⁹⁷

The second aspect of the post-1979 transformation in capital/labour relations in the sugar industry was the appearance of the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers' Union (SFAWU). As a member of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), which was formed in 1979, the SFAWU embraced the central FOSATU principles of being non-racial, of establishing strong factory floor organisation around factory floor union committees, of the subservience of union officials to workers' control, and of union non-alignment to political and other parties.⁹⁸ Being outspokenly critical of parallel unions and espousing organisational democracy,⁹⁹ the SFAWU was fundamentally at odds with most of the other unions active in the sugar industry. Apart from these differences, the SFAWU did not belong the sugar industry's Industrial Council. Its first successful penetration into the sugarmills was made at Dalton, whose workers were previously unorganised yet readily accessible to FOSATU organisers who had already established a foothold in southern Natal.¹⁰⁰

Thirdly, employers had to come to terms with the failure of their own attempts (detailed in Chapter 6) at repulsing such an intrusion as that made by the SFAWU. This demanded a shift in their approach to labour relations. This shift involved, *inter alia*, a change in the employers' discourse. On the one hand they acknowledged the dawning of a new "post sugarocratic" era in capital/labour relations:

a veritable revolution has been taking place in the relationships between management and the workforce, particularly with regard to black workers.

⁹⁷ Interview with F.Khumalo and B.Dlamuka, NUSMRE officials, Durban, 3.1.1983.

⁹⁸ See **Isisebenzi** (July, 1979).

⁹⁹ See **Fosatu Worker News** (February, 1980).

¹⁰⁰ Interview with J.Naidoo, SFAWU official, Durban, 10.9.1985.

The delicate nature of these negotiations and the time involved is something that was totally unheard of a few years ago and a very far cry from the paternalistic management style we once enjoyed.¹⁰¹

On the other hand they announced their commitment to a new institutional framework:

Managements in the Sugar Industry have accepted that freedom of association is a right and not a privilege to be denied or deferred; that unions are an integral part of the free enterprise system; and that while there will always be the inherent conflict of interests between employers and unions, this conflict can be contained, regulated and institutionalised.¹⁰²

While it is clear that a shift has indeed taken place in the employers' discourse, it is equally apparent that this did not mean that a more accommodating position has been adopted *vis-à-vis* organised black sugarmill workers. What the new terms of the employers' discourse reflects is a strategy of control by institutionalised incorporation.

The manifestation of the post-1979 transformation in capital/labour relations may be fruitfully discussed against the background of its three essential aspects as outlined above. Although the immediate consequence of the Wiehahn reforms was the launching of the NUSMRE, it was only during 1981 that the new scenario was clearly seen to be unfolding.

When late in March 1981 the owners of Union Co-op.'s Dalton sugarmill provided a 17% wage increase but simultaneously withdrew free food rations, workers there reacted with a work-stoppage. This was met with an immediate reprisal by the owners. Workers were evicted from their quarters by the police and arrested for trespassing, and others reportedly gave themselves up for arrest. The SFAWU then took up the

¹⁰¹South African Sugar Year Book (1983-84), pp.69-71.

¹⁰²Ibid., p.31.

workers' cause by challenging the employers' actions in court. The court's judgement went against the SFAWU and the employers were effectively given legal sanction to evict migrant workers at their discretion.¹⁰³ The SFAWU had demonstrated to sugarmillers that the putting down of a strike did not mean that the workers' militancy had been neutralised, and if the Union had been defeated in this instance, it was not going to retreat from the sugar industry with a bloodied nose.

A few months after the Dalton strike, in early October 1981 and with 10000 workers in various other industries already on strike, 2000 Hulett's workers at Darnall, Amatikulu, Mount Edgecombe, and Felixton sugarmills downed tools in protest against the state's announced plans to revise the conditions governing pension funds. The week-long strike by sugarmill workers had the NUSMRE officials seemingly caught up in action which they had neither anticipated nor carefully planned. Hulett's nevertheless moved quickly to a compromise, as the value of the cane stockpile created by the strike rose to R 1,5 million.¹⁰⁴ Although the pension strike was short-lived, the issue in question was to remain largely unresolved over the following years. What was for sugarmillers particularly significant about the pension dispute in 1981 was that "for the first time, strikes by factory workers had an adverse influence on milling time efficiency".¹⁰⁵

The SFAWU was more successful than it had been in the Dalton case when, after negotiating for 7 months with C.G.Smith, it entered into an agreement with the company in February 1982 through which it would in

¹⁰³Daily News 8.10.1981; Fosatu Worker News (April, 1982).

¹⁰⁴Daily News 5.10.1981, 6.10.1981, 7.10.1981 and 8.10.1981.

¹⁰⁵South African Sugar Year Book (1981-82), pp.54-56.

future be allowed to negotiate on behalf of Noodsberg sugarmill's workers. During the negotiations leading up to the agreement, C.G.Smith had pressed the SFAWU to apply for Industrial Council membership and had claimed that the company would apply to have the Industrial Council cover Noodsberg (which, as a relatively new sugarmill like Dalton, remained outside the scope of the Industrial Council since neither the workers nor the owners had made application to join it).¹⁰⁶ By holding out against C.G.Smith and securing the extra-Industrial Council agreement, the SFAWU had achieved something that was unprecedented in the sugar industry.

Having achieved its status as representative for the majority of Noodsberg's black workers, the SFAWU went on to usurp the position of the NUSMRE at the southern-most sugarmill in Natal, C.G.Smith's Umzinkulu factory. At Umzinkulu the SFAWU had found the NUSMRE to have worked through C.G.Smith to maintain its weak grass-roots contact with workers (by, for example, giving notice of increased subscriptions on company letterheads). There was little resistance to SFAWU's organisers when they moved into Umzinkulu, and members were readily recruited.¹⁰⁷

The agreement between the SFAWU and C.G.Smith was enhanced during the following year, 1983, when a committee was established to handle all negotiations at any C.G.Smith sugarmill where the SFAWU had organised the majority of workers. This committee, consisting of 6 stewards per sugarmill (Noodsberg and Umzinkulu), 3 SFAWU officials, and company representatives, immediately negotiated a 13% increase for the lowest paid workers and 7,5% for the highest paid, and food rations of R50 and R45 for Noodsberg's and Umzinkulu's workers respectively.¹⁰⁸ Since the

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Interview with J.Naidoo, SFAWU official, Durban, 10.9.1985.

¹⁰⁸*Fosatu Worker News* (April, 1983).

Industrial Council had recently provided for a 7,5% increase across the board and incorporated the food ration into this increase, the SFAWU could justifiably claim to have shown negotiating prowess.

While the SFAWU was gaining ground in the C.G.Smith sugarmills where the NUSMRE had had least success in organising workers, the latter union was spreading its influence elsewhere. During 1982 the NUSMRE made what is arguably its most outstanding contribution to the cause of sugar workers, by securing a court ruling that workers in cane trans-shipment zones be declared industrial workers (see Chapter 6, p.277). The year 1982 also saw the NUSMRE "in the midst of conflict",¹⁰⁹ when workers at 6 sugarmills (Hulett's Felixton, Amatikulu, Mount Edgecombe, and Darnall sugarmills, and Umfolozi and Entumeni) went on strike in October/November to contest the offer of a food allowance made by the respective sugar companies. The striking workers were dismissed and then selectively re-hired.¹¹⁰ Whether the NUSMRE had lost control over these workers or had been unable to control the strike to the advantage of the workers, it nevertheless appeared not to have lost its conviction that it had good cause for expanding its membership in other plants outside the sugar industry. During the latter half of 1982 and through 1983 the NUSMRE spread into transport, paper, milling, and other industries, in an attempt to recruit members. Re-named the National Sugar and Refining and Allied Industries Employees' Union, it pressed ahead with its recruitment drive under allegations by FOSATU of using subterfuge in the process.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹R.& L.Lambert, "State Reform and Working Class Resistance, 1982". In **South African Review 1**, edited by South African Research Service. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983, p.247.

¹¹⁰**Daily News** 2.11.1982.

¹¹¹**Fosatu Worker News** (November, 1982 and September, 1983).

While the NUSMRE was making forays outside the sugar industry, members of its original constituency within some sugarmills were abandoning the union in favour of the SFAWU. By early 1984 hundreds of NUSMRE members at the Pongola and Umfolozi sugarmills had reportedly resigned to join the SFAWU.¹¹² These gains by the SFAWU were again achieved at regionally peripheral sugarmills where the NUSMRE had only made limited inroads. The NUSMRE's strongholds were the sugarmills owned by Hulett's (which had brought the Union into being), while its following in other sugarmills, especially those situated furthest from its Durban headquarters, was weak.

Sugarmillers, and Hulett's in particular, could initially look upon the position adopted by the NUSMRE with some degree of self-satisfaction. However while the advance of the SFAWU may in its early stages have caused them some disquiet, its officials have gained the employers' respect as astute and "professional" negotiators.¹¹³ The employers' frequent, but cautious, references to inter-union rivalry in sugar industry publications mirrored their opinions on the respective unions involved. In mid-1983 the chairman of the South African Sugar Millers' Association (SASMA) looked back on the 1982

strikes over the feeding allowance issue [in which the NUSMRE was involved]. Some firm action was taken by the employers but these incidents also served to demonstrate that there are no winners in such a situation - only losers, and further damage was sustained to the good industrial relations climate we are trying to foster and encourage...

Recessions are never a fertile time for union pressure on remuneration and we should acknowledge the responsible approach taken to the wage negotiations some

¹¹²Posatu Worker News (January/February, 1984).

Because of the marginal majority commanded by SFAWU at Pongola, the sugarmill now has two agreements in operation with uneven consequences for the workers; one is an Industrial Council agreement and the other is between the SFAWU and C.G. Smith (Interview with E. Tough, Industrial Council Secretary, Durban, 9.9.1985).

¹¹³Interview with T. Vogel, SASA Personnel Consultant, Durban, 11.9.1985.

months ago [the NUSMRE and SFAWU had been involved in separate negotiations] which took cognisance of the very difficult situation faced by the Industry.¹¹⁴

A year later the vice-chairman of SASMA noted

an intensification of the rivalry between [the NUSMRE and the SFAWU]. The latter gained majority representation at a third mill and there is an active recruiting effort taking place at others. The [NUSMRE], on the other hand, commands effective black worker leadership in the Industry with representation at 13 mills...

In case there is a perception that either union could be prejudiced by being first to settle the wage issue [as the NUSMRE had done] and thereby perhaps afford the other the opportunity of achieving a better deal, this must be disabused.¹¹⁵

A more even-handed perspective on the rivalry was offered by SASA's Personnel Consultant, T.Vogel, when he declared that

The labour movement owes much to the establishment and development of representative Liaison Committees on the part of millers' managements and the mercurial charisma of home grown black employee leaders like Selby Nsibande of NASASALEU and others in the [SFAWU].

It is also becoming apparent that black union rivalry may still lead to internecine warfare based on ill feelings, jealousies, ideological differences and competition for membership in the same Sugar Industry. The grip of the recession and the waning fortunes of the industry are hopefully indicators to the union organisers and members that a more professional and institutional route is needed if the mobilisation of the black labour in the Sugar Industry is to be successfully continued.¹¹⁶

The plea for unions to adopt a "professional" approach to capital/labour relations was repeated when the managing director of the Tongaat-Hulett Group - the heartland of the NUSMRE constituency - expressed anxiety over the probability that

once the period of inter-union rivalry and competition for members is over...Trade Unions are likely to be under considerable pressure from their members to use the collective bargaining process to make demands on

¹¹⁴South African Sugar Year Book (1982-83), pp.45-46.

¹¹⁵SASJ 68:6(1984), pp.213-217.

¹¹⁶South African Sugar Year Book (1983-84), p.31.

central Government and Regional and Municipal authorities.¹¹⁷

Warning of the employers' inability to entertain such demands being made, he was concerned to ensure "that we carry out our industrial relations policies in a way which is professional and effective".¹¹⁸

The sugarmillers' sensitivity to the the issue of "politicised" capital/labour relations must be quite acute given that all organised black sugarmill workers are now either linked to Inkatha, to which the NUSMRE became affiliated in 1984,¹¹⁹ or to FOSATU, of which both the SFAWU and (since 1983) the NSIEU are affiliates. Sugarmillers face in Inkatha an avowedly "cultural movement" with which, at least at the leadership level, they appear to be on conciliatory terms. On the other hand they face in FOSATU an avowedly proletarian federation, which they have accorded due respect as a "professional" organisation representing workers' interests.

That the recent history of organised responses by black sugarmill workers has revolved around the NUSMRE and the SFAWU begs the question: what has become of the NSIEU? The NSIEU embarked on its mission as the first union to organise black sugarmill workers in the late 1930s under conditions which had prevented its officials from erecting strong sugarmill-based representation had they so intended to do. The NSIEU was nurtured and it grew within the context of sugarocratic domination. Its organisational structure has been maintained since its founding, centralised around its Durban-based secretary. The present incumbent,

¹¹⁷South African Sugar Year Book (1983-84), pp.69-71.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹The principal reason for making this alliance is claimed to be the NUSMRE desire to share a platform with Inkatha to voice their mutual opposition to economic sanctions against, or disinvestment from, South Africa (Interview with B.Dlamuka, NUSMRE official, Durban, 9.9.1985).

R.Pillay, has been the NSIEU's chief official for over a quarter of a century, and he has been witness to his constituency's shrinkage during the past five years to the advantage of first the NUSMRE and then the SFAWU. Had the NSIEU responded to the post-1979 transformation by adapting its organisational structure it may well have been in a position today to command a majority in some sugarmills. Instead, it represents a thinly-spread membership in the Industrial Council.¹²⁰ Its most notable public action since the appearance of its two rivals has been its affiliation to FOSATU. It is likely that the respective affiliations of all three black sugarmill workers' unions will draw their members into the very sort of political struggle which employers are so keen to obviate.

Summary

The Natal sugarcrocity has had to contend with various forms of workers' accommodative and resistant responses to the sugarmilling labour process. During the indentures period these responses typically took the form of individual and spontaneous resistance. These were responses to a system as much as to its immediate effects, and sugarocrats retaliated by urging greater state control over its functioning so as to tighten up the system. When, after the expiry of the Indian indenture system, worker organisation first made its appearance in the sugar industry, sugarocrats were faced with a situation to which they responded by trying to sow disorganisation. Thus was the history of sugarmill workers' responses influenced by modes of sugarocratic control.

¹²⁰It is interesting in this context that the NSIEU's Secretary walked out of the Industrial Council after failing to have a closed shop agreement concluded "a few years ago" - had he been successful the NSIEU's membership would have swollen (Interview with E.Tough, Industrial Council Secretary, Durban, 9.9.1985).

Collective responses to the sugarmilling labour process in Natal have historically been in keeping with the global picture. On the one hand, collective resistance has been consolidated, but not fully homogenised, with the development of black sugarmill workers' unions. On the other hand, certain layers of the workforce, the collectively more accommodating white workers with the most privileged positions in the occupational hierarchy, remained aloof of black workers and their concerns. Such divided responses have given emphasis to the dialectical relationship between workers' responses in general and employers' controls.

CONCLUSION

When at the turn of the twentieth century, the small group of sugarmillers emerged in Natal who were to maintain dynastic control over sugarmilling for the next six decades, it is unlikely that they could have foreseen the scope of their historical importance. They could not realistically have anticipated their own success in the light of colonial Natal's past. The only points of reference they might be said to have had as they embarked on their dynastic journey were located in their ancestral "Home". These were the ruling ideas of Victorian Britain; above all, the ideologies of imperialism and capitalism. Their ambitions would have been rooted in them, and their every success would have fortified their allegiance to those ideologies.

As Natal's sugarocracy made its ascent, its respective empires expanded. Simultaneously, the ascendant sugarocracy was gradually being atomised, with control over sugarmilling becoming increasingly concentrated in fewer hands. In its ascent the sugarocracy was faced by innumerable difficulties, not least of which was that of maintaining a stable, predictable, and tractable workforce. This workforce was, for its part, riven by a range of attributes, some of which, such as race, were socially ascribed, others, such as skills, achieved within the constraints of a racial division of labour, and all underlined by ideology. In its pursuit of capital under stable conditions, the sugarocracy could, particularly in its formative years, prey on some of these differences from its position of dominance over working people. This study has turned on the imperatives, the methods, and the consequences of that domination.

Sugarocratic domination of the South African sugarmilling labour process

manifested itself in various forms through four fairly distinct periods. The first of these, beginning in 1905 with the advent of fully centralised industrial sugarmilling and ending in 1914 with the termination of the indentures period and the coincident outbreak of World War I, was a relatively brief period during which the sugarocracy consolidated its position as a group of bourgeois millers-cum-planters. The second period, lasting until the late 1930s, spanned the years during which the sugarocracy turned to organisational means for struggling against local and global impediments to surplus value realisation. Thereafter, in the period until 1962, the sugarocracy embarked on an expansionary and highly competitive journey at the end of which its size had been compressed quite considerably. Although the 1962 clash has been viewed as the end of the sugarocratic era *per se*, most remaining members of the sugarocracy were only to completely abdicate control when the sugar industry was overwhelmed by Anglo-American and Barlow Rand at the turn of the 1980s. Because the sugarocracy as a bloc (which could reproduce itself as such) was no more, the two decades since 1962 have been referred to as the post-sugarocratic period. As the following synopses show, each of these periods was as distinctive for its connotations for the sugarocracy as it was for its connotations for sugarmill employees.

1905 - 1914

The Natal sugar industry entered the twentieth century after having survived the local and global obstacles to capital accumulation in sugar which had imposed themselves during the late nineteenth century. With the signing of the 1903 Customs Convention the industry had also gained some security against competition from Mauritius and other overseas

producers. Inside the sugarmills (which had already incorporated vacuum pans), the capacity and efficiency of extraction was being improved by the installation of new milling plant. But the hallmark of this first period was the sugarocracy's labour-coercive practices.

Sugarocratic domination showed few signs of having moved beyond those forms which had prevailed in nineteenth century plantations. Whether constrained by indentures or by pass laws, unskilled black workers could expect an uncompromising dominance. Skilled personnel, particularly those with sugar-making skills, faced a more benign form of domination. Given not only their special skills, but also the way in which many were attracted from abroad, these latter employees were placed in a relationship of pragmatic, if not in every case interdependent, accord with the sugarocracy. In this respect Mauritius exerted a significant influence on the nuances of sugarocratic rule: Mauritius was a source of technical and managerial employees (as well as field overseers), and it provided a model for the organisation of sugarmill labour with which some early sugarocrats were personally familiar.

Although worker consciousness surfaced in various acts of resistance, these did not stimulate distinctive counter strategies from the employers' side. The methods used to control labour in the sugarmills and the sugar villages remained unchanged during the entire indentures period. Sugarmill workers continued to be exposed to an uncompromising patriarchalism which had sugarocrats expecting complete subservience and refusing to take cognisance of workers' demands, however these were articulated.

1914 - late 1930s

The curtailment of Indian immigration in 1911 and the consequent expiry of indentures in 1914 forced the sugarocracy to turn its collective attention to the recruitment of proletarian (and migrant partly-proletarianised) labour. Although this imperative came at a time when the pressures on Africans to seek incomes outside the decreasingly productive Reserves were mounting, the sugarocracy had no institutionalised basis from which it might compete with other employers (especially the mining companies) for African labour. The sugarocracy was unsuccessful in its endeavour to have the Union Government provide it with the measure of support which it had enjoyed during the colonial period, and which the mining companies now had. The problem of procuring cheap unskilled labour was an industry-wide (albeit possibly somewhat exaggerated) issue which did not have any obvious ramifications for sugarmilling as such. Indeed, despite their declared inability to offer potential workers conditions which were as good as mine workers' conditions, sugarocrats housed African workers on their properties under conditions which even fell short of the scant statutes they had had to observe with respect to indentured Indian workers. They appeared uninterested in trying to attract labour, and hoped rather to have that labour foisted on them.

Of course the inter-war period was a generally difficult one for sugar capital in Natal, notwithstanding high world prices for sugar in 1920 and the cessation of the Moçambique Convention in 1923. In 1925 the world's sugar producers were given a foretaste of what was to come during the Great Depression. The production of a large sugar crop in South Africa that year coincided with global overproduction to set

prices tumbling, and five years later world sugar prices again went into a steep decline.

The sugarocracy had come to those straits at a time of global depression, and it was hard put under the circumstances to seek protection both by trying to secure imperial preference and by rallying cane growers to its cause. As regards the actions taken by the sugarocracy in response to the strictures of the market, it is worth recalling that

Surplus value has to be produced but also **realized** in the market. What this implies is that the realization of surplus value (i.e. finding markets, selling in those markets and making a profit) may be more crucial than the production of surplus value for certain firms, certain industries or during certain periods.¹

The realisation crisis of the inter-war period led to the institutionalisation of collective responses, with the sugarocracy throwing its weight behind the BEPO, FCI, and SASA.

To compound the realisation problem, the production of surplus value was simultaneously held in jeopardy by workers who were themselves suffering the depression. The late 1930s saw sugarmill workers acting for the first time in a manner which had the sugarocracy take notice. This and legislation in favour of industrial workers marked the turning point within the sugarmills from labour-using and dehumanising forms of exploitation, to labour-saving and exploitation tempered by conscious sugarocratic paternalism.

Late 1930s - 1962

The inflationary war years saw sugarmill labour pressing its demands for

¹ C.R.Littler and G.Salaman, "Bravermania and Beyond: Recent Theories of the Labour Process", **Sociology** 16:2(1982), pp.251-269.

better wages, while sugarocrats faced a relative shrinkage of export earnings and difficulties with technical improvements. Then the sugarocracy entered the post-war period on the crest of a wave. After the removal in 1947 of the quotas which had been set in 1936 there was a massive increase in sugar production. Then with the signing of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement in 1951 having spurred the sugarocracy on to intensify production and expand investments in sugar, it was poised to become party to the 1953 International Sugar Agreement from a position of strength and optimism. The doubling of the world sugar price late in the 1950s contributed to make this a particularly significant decade for the sugarocracy.

In the midst of the prosperity of the immediate post-war years, sugarocratic paternalism could be consciously displayed in a more benevolent form than previously. The earlier reforms in Tongaat undoubtedly stimulated the new-found interest in community-building and employees' welfare. Although the conditions for consciously benevolent paternalism were enhanced by the sugar villages' status as relatively isolated and "complete" communities,² it did not follow that workers would respond positively to community-building and its underlying rationale. While the nature of the sugar village might historically have presented an impediment to formally organised workers' resistance, it had not prevented the development of worker consciousness.³ Of this the sugarocrats were quite aware, and ideology came to be used with some alacrity in their quest for stable social relations.

² The term "complete community" was used in a similar context by R.Takaki, **Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii**. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984, p.99.

³ On the limits of work-place isolation as a factor in constraining workers' resistance see E.Shorter and C.Tilly, **Strikes in France 1830-1968**. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp.287-291.

As sugarmill workers contemplated the new sugarocratic countenance, their employers were locked in battle for supremacy in the sugar industry and (from the early 1960s) diversifying out of sugar. The growth of the ascendant companies was attended by the growth of professional management, and the distance between workers and the sugarocracy was stretched correspondingly. Thus sugarmill workers saw the conscious sugarocratic paternalism of the post-War period being rapidly transformed into a bureaucratically administered welfare system.

Although the structures of sugarmill ownership and control were undergoing change, workers' responses were formulated with respect to the labour process as they experienced it, and not in terms of the configuration of the company directorate. And while paternalism may have brought with it certain material improvements, workers generally showed that they had not been taken in by its implicit ideological content.

Since 1962

It is difficult to speak of the existence of a sugarocracy as such after 1962. Although the 1962 clash within the sugarocracy ended with sugarocratic contenders as victors, it also marked the beginning of mining (and allied industrial and finance) capital's more deliberate penetration of the sugarocracy's strongholds. For almost two decades after 1962 individual sugarocratic families remained in effective control of the largest sugar companies' operations, but the sugarocracy was gradually being denied the possibility of reproducing itself.

This transitional stage in the history of sugar capital coincided with the emergence of monopoly capitalism in South Africa. The linking of

the fortunes of the sugar industry with the progress of the leading monopolistic powers in South Africa was also associated with developments in sugar technology and structural control. Automation proceeded apace, most significantly in the boiling house, and the corps of skilled sugarmill workers shrank appreciably. The shrinkage in the number of positions assigned to skilled workers in the sugarmill was counterposed by the expansion of the managerial stratum and the raising of educational and training levels for workers designated as semi-skilled. These changes were attended by modifications in the employers' industrial relations discourse and practices, which involved a de-racialisation of the division of non-managerial labour and an attempt to inculcate petit bourgeois aspirations amongst black workers.

Black sugarmill workers exerted a dynamic and purposeful influence on their employers' ideological and community-building campaigns by drawing them into increasingly more calculated practices. The waxing wave of collective, if not always organised, resistance, particularly since 1974, met with hard-line repression by employers, and it had them showing mounting concern for both institutionalised capital/labour relations and improved extra-work facilities for workers.

Whatever reformist measures might have meant in material terms, sugarmill workers were not complacent recipients of company welfare. Possibly the strongest single piece of evidence in support of this view was that provided by sugarmill workers when the fading sugarocratic voice was heard from the platform of support for a "yes" vote in the November 1983 constitutional referendum: it was responded to with great resonance by 2500 black workers at the Amatikulu, Darnall, Felixton, and Umfolozi sugarmills who held a protest strike on the day their bosses

and the rest of the white electorate cast their votes.

* * *

When Freyre referred to the **bagaceira** and Genovese to "the world" created by slave-holders, they were reflecting on cultural milieus associated with plantation sugarmilling, *inter alia*, in particular regions. An endeavour has been made in this thesis to penetrate the cultural milieu of the South African sugarmill, and to explain the nature of the local sugarocracy's impress on the terrain of sugarmill workers' experience. While it has offered an explanation of the sugarocratic impress as one facet of the culture of the sugarmill, the thesis provides an implicit agenda for research into the actual experience of work and social life in the sugar villages.

The conclusions of this thesis facilitate entry into the culture of the sugarmill for researchers in the future by sparing them having to embark on their task with nothing but the sugarocracy's historiography to inform them: important though it may be for understanding the intricacies of sugarocratic existence and domination, the version of sugarmilling history told by sugarocratic biographers and ideologues may be accepted as belonging to the realm of bourgeois ideology.

APPENDIX 1: SOUTH AFRICAN SUGAR COMPANIES' DIRECTORATES, 1940 - 1960

* British

** Mauritian

Names of alternate directors contained in brackets

Natal Estates

1940	1950	1960
B Halsey(chair)	B Halsey(chair)	WB Collier(chair)
WA Campbell(MD)	WA Campbell(MD)	WA Campbell(MD)
W Short	HR Butcher	HR Butcher
L Byron	UWM Campbell	(MR Butcher)
G Murray	JW Bower	UWM Campbell
HR Butcher	AIM Hepburn	JW Bower
HW Payne	AJ Hollobone*	AIM Hepburn
GA Payne*	DH Hepburn*	GE Noyce
RH Wisley*	JRS Duncan*	AJ Hollobone*
DH Hepburn*	KT Payne*	REJ Hepburn*
		KT Payne*
JG Allsop(Sec)		
JW Bower(GM)	JW Bower(GM)	AA Lloyd(GM)

Tonga Sugar Company

1940	1950	1960
C Whytock(chair)	D Saunders(chair)	D Saunders(chair)
D Saunders(MD)	RS Armstrong(v-c)	CJ Saunders(v-c/MD)
D Calder	RT Polkinghorne	TT Woodhead
RT Polkinghorne	W Fitzgerald	MG Mackeurtan
W Fitzgerald	HA Holding	J Mungle
RS Armstrong	TT Woodhead	FP Spooner
TT Woodhead	RG Armstrong	RGT Watson
SW Taylor*	MG Mackeurtan	RS Armstrong
LA Coker*	J Mungle	WH Fitzgerald
	LA Coker*	AD Hankinson(asst-MD)
	FS Morris*	S Morris*
		(JPN Bentley)
		WHB Mirrlees*
		(CF Pollack)
JB Bailey(sec)	AD Hankinson(sec)	RB Thompson(sec)
RGT Watson(GM)	RGT Watson(GM)	

Crookes Bros

1940	1950	1960
GJ Crookes(chair)	JJ Crookes(chair)	JJ Crookes(chair)
CG Smith	TCB Crookes	GV Crookes
JJ Crookes	GV Crookes	FSV Gillatt
GV Crookes	VJS Crookes	VJS Crookes
VJS Crookes	FSV Gillatt	TCB Crookes
FSV Gillatt	AW Dickens	CL Crookes
	M Ironside	
SH Hey(sec)	SH Hey(sec)	SH Hey(sec)

Reynolds Bros

1940	1950	1960
CG Smith	GV Crookes(chair/MD)	GV Crookes(chair/MD)
GJ Crookes(chair/MD)	JJ Crookes	JJ Crookes
L Reynolds	VJS Crookes	VJS Crookes
AW Dickens	AW Dickens	H Brunskill
GV Crookes	NL Davey	E Camden Smith
TB Job*	TB Job*	S Morris*
SW Taylor*	FS Morris*	RH Waring
SH Hey(sec)	SH Hey(sec)	SH Hey(sec)
	E Camden Smith(GM)	WG Galbraith(GM)

Umzinkulu Sugar Company

1940	1950	1960
CG Smith	AW Dickens	H Brunskill(chair)
AW Dickens	SH Hey	GV Crookes
VJS Crookes	H Brunskill	SH Hey
	W Cheadle(GM)	FR Jones(sec)
		VC Crookes(GM)

Sir JL Hulett & Sons

1940	1950	1960
ASL Hulett(chair)	GM Hulett(chair/MD)	GM Hulett(chair/MD)
WER Edwards(MD)	LC Grice(v-c)	S Smith
WA Hulett	S Smith	RL Hulett
HB Hulett	RL Hulett	RSL Hulett
LC Grice	RSL Hulett	B Freakes
EHM Leggett*	L Lyle*	LS Robinson
(HTL Leefe)	(FL Garland)	(FR Foster)
L Lyle*	HJ Page*	(DC Grice)
(C Whytock)	(RL Goulding)	(DE Mitchell)
JOP Bland*	DA Donelan*	L Lyle*
(GM Hulett)	(LS Robinson)	(JN Hulett)
		DA Donelan*
		(DBL Hulett)
		W Nash*
		(JM Taylor)
		(RJB Stewart*)
B Freakes(sec)		BK Digby(sec)
		JN Hulett(GM)

Illovo Sugar Estates

1940	1950	1960
BJW Pearce(chair)	RL Goulding(chair)	GDL Haysom(chair)
P Saville	RL Pearce(GM)	OWM Pearce(GM)
RL Pearce(GM)	J McLaren	KW Pearce
BED Pearce(GM)	AW Dickens	PS Pearce
RL Goulding	OWM Pearce	JS Calder
		PH Hind
		GC Scully
C Avern-Taplin(sec)	C Avern-Taplin(sec)	JT Dunlop(sec)

Zululand Sugar Millers and Planters

1940	1950	1960
WB Calder(chair/MD)	WB Calder(chair/MD)	GM Hulett(chair)
AS Goble	JSP Mackness	S Smith
CT Roper	JB Calder	RL Hulett
GH Morris	LC Grice	RSL Hulett
JB Calder	H Armstrong	B Freakes
LC Grice	LP Addison	JN Hulett
		IS Robinson
		DBL Hulett
		JM Taylor(MD)
		(DC Grice)
		(LP Addison)
W Murray Smith & Berend(secs)	Smith & Berend(secs)	N Paton(sec)
H Armstrong(GM)	H Armstrong(GM)	C Jelley(GM)

Melville Sugar Company

1940	1950	1960
H Ducray**(chair)	H Ducray**(chair)	S Mayer
MD de Speville**	MD de Speville**	GL Mayer
IM Martin**	F Leclezio**	RV Paul
J Leclezio**	RE Mayer**	JR Becker
FE Montocchio**	IM Martin**	W Harvey*
RE Mayer**	HA Mayer**	H Bowser*
		KW Hogg*
SE Mayer**(sec)		RE Mayer**

Prospecton Sugar Estates

1940	
C Platt(MD)	Acquired by Tongaat in 1945 for 140000 of Tongaat's one pound shares.
AH Langton(sec)	

Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal Sugar Company

1940	1950	1960
CG Smith(chair)	AW Dickens(chair)	FSV Gillatt(chair/MD)
GJ Crookes	JJ Crookes	JJ Crookes
JJ Crookes	FSV Gillatt	JS Calder
AW Dickens	JS Calder	GV Crookes
D Calder	WB Coverdale	SH Hey
FSV Gillatt	GV Crookes-	FNN Crookes
WB Coverdale	CRS Crookes	IFG Gillatt
SH Hey(sec)	SH Hey(sec)	FR Jones(sec)

Central Factory

1940	
RG Armstrong(MD)	Acquired by Tongaat in 1946 for 280000 of Tongaat's one pound shares.

Entumeni Sugar Milling Company

1940	1950	1960
W Saville(MD)	EMF Saville	EMF Saville
	HL Crockett	HL Crockett
	RF Saville(MD)	RF Saville(MD)
	UJ Saville	AES Saville
		UJ Saville
	WL Fletcher(sec)	WL Fletcher(sec)

Umfolozi Co-operative Sugar Planters

1940	1950	1960
G Heaton Nicholls	GJ Badenhorst	EEH Bowles
JA Erlandson	AJ Bonella	JS Bertram
SWOL Johnson	HC Proksch	HSJ Adlam
CVS Hitchins	GG Roberts	DE Dooley
HC Hitchins	PH van Rooyen	AC Liesenberg
JK Johnson	CK Johnson	HA Meintjes
LE Dunton	LE Dunton	DG Heaton Nicholls
		HC Proksch
		SS Shire

Shire's Factory

1940	1950
JH Shire(owner)	JA Shire(owner)

Doornkop Sugar Estates

1940	1950	1960
N Rosenberg(MD)	P Murray(Durban dir)	HC Payne
		JH Bayfield*
		I Blumberg
		JD Forrester
		HN Hart
		AM Lensvelt
		CD Lloyd
		EL Lloyd
		FN McKowen
		H Olthaver
		(NH Gilfillan)
		(F Humphries)
		(T Woker)
		(TWT Baines)
		(A Bosworth-Smith)

New Guelderland Sugar Factory

1940
Estate G Stewart

Glendale Sugar Estate

1940	1950	1960
EM Paruk(owners)	EM Paruk(owners)	DI Paruk(MD)
		AI Paruk(manager)
		MI Paruk

Hulett's South African Refineries

1940	1950	1960
WER Edwards(chair)	RS Armstrong(chair)	GM Hulett(chair)
ASL Hulett	WB Calder	CJ Saunders
WB Calder	GM Hulett	S Smith
W Fitzgerald	W Fitzgerald	JM Taylor
WA Campbell	LC Grice	TT Woodhead
C Platt	GC Sulin	LS Robinson
GJ Crookes	S Smith	JPN Bentley
RS Armstrong		LF Rich(MD)
GM Hulett		
GC Sulin(business manager)		
LF Rich(sec)	LF Rich(sec)	ER Evans(sec)

Pongola Sugar Milling Company

1960
GV Crookes(chair)
SH Hey
RH Waring
AJ Nothling(GM)
ET Poynton(transport manager)
FR Jones(sec)

APPENDIX 2: CORPORATE OWNERSHIP OF SUGARMILLS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Mauritian sugar industry had already acquired considerable global prominence and a relatively sophisticated production and research infrastructure by the time that the South African sugar industry germinated along colonial Natal's coast. Mauritius supplied much of the expertise and some of the mechanical plant upon which Natal's sugar industry depended in its formative years, and the Natal industry was permeated by immigrant Mauritian personnel. Partially upon the expertise accumulated in Mauritius and Natal, and financed mainly by metropolitan British and Portuguese capital, sugarmilling subsequently took root at the turn of the twentieth century in the very area of Moçambique which had earlier yielded multitudes of slaves to Mauritian sugarmillers, *inter alia*. Since the turn of the twentieth century sugar production has intensified in these three regions, *viz.* Mauritius, Natal, and Moçambique, and expanded into other regions on the southern African sub-continent. There follow brief notes on patterns of ownership and control of today's sugarmills in the former British colonies of southern Africa and the Mascarenes, excluding South Africa.

Mauritius

Mauritius, the progenitor of sugar production in the wider southern African context, had as early as 1776 three sugarmills in operation; one powered by animals, one by wind, and another by water. Although the number of sugarmills on the island found its peak in 1863, the centralisation of production really began to accelerate after 1870, when European sugar beet processing placed the Mauritian industry in jeopardy. Accompanying centralisation since 1880 was the separation of

estates from sugarmills. Thus whereas in 1870 there were 218 sugarmills on mostly individually-owned estates, by 1909 the ratio of sugarmills to estates was approximately 1:2.¹

Mauritian sugarmillers became closely linked with certain branches of the British bourgeoisie after 1810, when France was ousted from its position of colonial rule over the island. British capital came to feature within some of the larger Mauritian sugar companies, and by the 1830s British merchants were ranked amongst the major exporters of Mauritian sugars. Mauritian sugarmillers used these avenues as well as certain British Members of Parliament, appointed as their London agents, to wield political influence in Britain.² The significance of these liaisons became starkly apparent in the 1960s, as Mauritius stood poised before independence and the group of sugarmill owners "used all its considerable influence in London through Tate & Lyle and the Conservative Party to delay universal suffrage as long as possible".³ After independence in 1968 Tate & Lyle remained an important ally of Mauritian sugarmillers, and its ownership of Britain's sugar refineries vested the corporation with a mantle of power which Mauritian sugarmillers valued, so long as agreements such as the 1975 APC-EEC Convention of Lomé were in the offing.⁴

1 R.Lamusse, "The Economic Development of the Mauritius Sugar Industry", *Revue Agricole et Sucrière de L'île Maurice* 43:1(1964), pp.22-38.

2 See M.D.North Coombes, "Labour Problems in the Sugar Industry of Ile de France or Mauritius 1790-1842". Master's dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1978.

3 J.Houbert, "Reunion I: French Decolonisation in the Mascareignes", *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 18:2(1980), pp.145-171. See also R.Seegobin and L.Collen, "Mauritius: Class Forces and Political Power", *Review of African Political Economy* 8(1977), pp.109-118.

4 See the terms of the Convention in *Africa Year Book and Who's Who 1977*. London: Africa Journal, 1978. Tate & Lyle commented at some length on the Convention in their 1979 Annual Report, and it has been discussed in A.G.Kemp, editor, *Africa and the EEC in the Aftermath of Lomé and UNCTAD IV*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University African Studies Group, 1977.

By 1980 known corporate holdings in the Mauritian sugar industry were Tate & Lyle's two-thirds share of The Mauritius Molasses Company; Lonrho's interests in Benares Sugar Company, through FAW Investments which is registered in the Isle of Man; and Lonrho's controlling interest of Mon Tresor & Mon Desert, which had three of Mauritius' 21 sugarmills in 1980.⁵ Lonrho's entry into the Mauritian sugar industry had been made in 1967, when the corporation acquired the Anglo-Ceylon & General Estates Company which had operated in Mauritius since the dawn of the century.⁶

Zimbabwe

Sugarcane was first milled in colonial Southern Rhodesia in 1936 by Triangle Sugar Estate, using a second-hand sugarmill from Natal. Triangle was taken over from the Southern Rhodesian government in 1954 by a syndicate of Natal sugarocrats, who in 1957 relinquished control to Hulett's. Sugar refining was also first done in the territory in 1936, when Rhodesian Sugar Refineries opened its Bulawayo refinery. This latter company, which subsequently opened a refinery in Salisbury, in 1951, and another in Ndola, Northern Rhodesia, in 1960, had been established by the younger brother of the founder of Mozambique's Sena Sugar Estates.

The second company to mill sugar in Southern Rhodesia was Hippo Valley Estates. Four years after the company was formed in 1956, with a strong contingent of immigrant Mauritian planters within the directorate, a

5 **Who Owns Whom, United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.** 2 Vols. London: Dun & Bradstreet, 1980.

6 S.Cronjé et al **Lonrho: Portrait of a Multinational.** Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976; A.Macmillan, editor, **Mauritius Illustrated.** London: Collingridge, 1914, p.370; and N.Ramachandran, **Foreign Plantation Investment in Ceylon, 1889-1958.** Ceylon: Central Bank, 1963.

used sugarmill was bought in Mauritius and put into operation in 1962. In 1965 a second sugarmill was erected by Hippo Valley Estates at Chiredzi.

All raw sugar produced in the country is marketed by Sugar Sales(Private)Ltd, formed in 1963 by Triangle, Hippo Valley Estates, and Chirundu Sugar Estates; the last shareholder being a company formed in 1953 under the same board of directors as that of Rhodesia Sugar Refineries.

Although Triangle and Hippo Valley Estates were initially indigenous companies, they were rapidly absorbed by foreign concerns. While the former was embraced by Hulett's when the favourable international sugar agreements and markets of the 1950s encouraged expansion, the latter company fell prey to two foreign contenders, Anglo-American and Tate & Lyle. Tate & Lyle also secured a majority shareholding in Rhodesia Sugar Refineries and a controlling share of Sugar Marketing(now Sugar Distributors), which markets packaged sugar within the country. Through its ownership of Chirundu Sugar Estates, Tate & Lyle also entered the tripartite directorship of Sugar Sales. See Figure A for details of sugarmill ownership in Zimbabwe.⁷

Swaziland

Sugarmilling began in Swaziland in 1958 when Ubombo Ranches put into operation its recently acquired second-hand sugarmill from Natal.

⁷ Figure A is based on the following sources: D.G.Clarke, **Foreign Companies and International Investment in Zimbabwe**. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1980; **Finance Week**, 13-19 March, 1980, pp.323-324; **South African Sugar Year Book** (1979); and the following company reports: Anglo American Corporation (1980), and Tate & Lyle (1979).

Ubombo Ranches, initially a ranching company, had become a subsidiary of the Usutu River Sugar Company after the latter company was floated in 1958. During 1959 the Usutu River Sugar Company was converted into the Swaziland Sugar Milling Company.

Another sugarmilling company made its appearance in Swaziland in 1958 when a joint venture between Hulett's and the Colonial(subsequently the Commonwealth) Development Corporation saw the formation of Mhlume (Swaziland) Sugar Company. At the opening of the Mhlume sugarmill, which crushed its first crop in 1960, the British High Commissioner in Swaziland found it appropriate to include in his address three verses of doggerel in tribute to Guy Hulett, and an admission that he could

think of no better example of the happy application of the common-sense British principle of mixing many elements of European and African virtue, public and private, in a happy, creative and savoury brew.⁸

The High Commissioner would have viewed the brew in a different light some twenty years later, when the chairman of Lonrho Sugar Corporation, the parent company of which had acquired control of Swaziland Sugar Milling Company in 1968, commented that

The season at Ubombo was marred by an illegal labour strike organised by a minority of agitators. It was however rapidly stopped with the help of government, and work has resumed with greatly improved labour relations which have been excellent ever since.⁹

Ubombo had also experienced a strike in 1963,¹⁰ before Lonrho had taken over the company. Close collaboration between sugar companies and the colonial and post-1968 Swaziland state in putting down the strikes was one facet of the intimate and cordial relationship between sugarmillers and the government. Then there was the association established through

⁸ SASJ 44:5(1960), pp.369-371.

⁹ Lonrho Sugar Corporation, Annual Report (1980).

¹⁰ M.Fransman, "Labour, Capital and the State in Swaziland, 1962-1977", *South African Labour Bulletin* 7:6(1982), pp.58-89.

the Swaziland government's take-over of the Hulett share in the Mhlume sugarmill and, more recently, its large contribution towards the Simunye sugarmill which was opened during 1980. The new sugarmill is managed by Tate & Lyle Technical Services, the parent company of which is a minor shareholder in the venture. It is noteworthy that the fields from which Simunye is supplied are mechanically harvested. See Figure B for details of sugarmill ownership in Swaziland.¹¹

Zambia

As has already been mentioned, the commissioning of a refinery predated the local milling of sugar in Northern Rhodesia. Tate & Lyle retained a controlling interest in the Ndola refinery when in 1964 it was transferred from the books of Rhodesia Sugar Refineries to those of the newly formed Ndola Sugar Company. The latter company was renamed in 1966 as the Zambia Sugar Company, and in the same year a subsidiary, Nakambala Estate, was formed to grow sugarcane. Since 1968 this sugarcane has been crushed in the Nakambala sugarmill, which had been relocated from Chirundu, whence it had gone from New Guelderland in Natal.

The collaboration between the Zambian government and British sugar capital, represented by Tate & Lyle, is necessarily intensive. Although the Zambian state acquired almost complete ownership of the local sugar company through its Industrial Development Corporation(INDECO),¹² Tate & Lyle retained a small share and responsibility for management. See

¹¹ Figure B is based on the following sources: SASJ 64:9(1980), pp.367-371; and the following company reports: C.G.Smith Sugar(1980), Crookes Bros.(1979), Lonrho Sugar Corporation(1979), and Tate & Lyle(1979).

¹² See Cronjé, Lonrho., and L.Turner, **Multinational Companies and the Third World**. London: Allen Lane, 1973.

Figure C for details of sugarmill ownership in Zambia.¹³

Malawi

If Tate & Lyle can be said to hold the reins of the Zambian sugar industry without being a major shareholder therein, then Lonrho's dominion over the sugar industry of Malawi is unquestionable. Not only is Lonrho the most prominent shareholder in the two companies producing sugar in the country, but it also holds management contracts for both sugarmills concerned. And the penetration of Lonrho into the country's economy came out of a particularly intimate tie which the company established with the Malawian government.

The Sugar Corporation of Malawi was formed in 1965 after Lonrho had collaborated for a year with the state to prepare seed-cane and to resettle large numbers of people occupying the land which was selected for the sugar venture. Production in the SUCOMA sugarmill, which was built by a South African company, began in 1967. A more recently formed company, Dwangwa Sugar Corporation, has constructed a second sugarmill in the country which also operates under Lonrho management.

These sugarmilling projects are the most recent investments by Lonrho in the industry on the sub-continent, and they also reflect a consolidation of the Lonrho machinations in sugar company shares. As has been mentioned, in 1967 Lonrho bought a company owning three sugarmills in Mauritius. This was effected by a Lonrho controlled company, Swaziland Sugar Milling Company, which in 1972 gave over control of the Mauritian interests to Lonrho in exchange for its shares in SUCOMA. In 1977 the

¹³ Figure C is based on the following sources: **South African Sugar Year Book** (1979); and Tate & Lyle (1979).

picture cleared when Swaziland Sugar Milling Company was renamed Lonrho Sugar Corporation. This subsidiary of Lonrho's now controls sugarmills in South Africa, Mauritius, Swaziland, and Malawi, and has a Mauritian as its chairman and joint managing director. See Figure D for details of sugarmill ownership in Malawi.¹⁴

Summary

The majority of southern Africa's sugarmills are controlled, if not owned, by South Africa- or England-based multinational corporations. Evidence points to a readiness on the part of some of the corporations to engage in sugarmilling projects as minority shareholders, in order to derive the benefits of plant supply contracts; management contracts; refining and distribution contracts; and research and development(R & D) opportunities. Tate & Lyle is the most prominent corporation in this respect, being not only the owner of the Mirrlees Watson Company which manufactures sugarmill components, but having also a strong R & D function in the industry, as well as owning the British refineries. The investment of foreign capital in the sugar industries of southern Africa is integrally associated with transfers of plant, technology, and personnel, and while redundant sugarmills from Mauritius and Natal have been relocated in new sugar-producing regions, Mauritius and, to a lesser extent, South Africa have been important sources of sugarmilling experts for all the sugar-producing countries in southern Africa. This accentuates the pattern of foreign domination over sugarmilling in most southern African countries.

¹⁴ Figure D is based on the following sources: **South African Sugar Year Book** (1979); and Lonrho Sugar Corporation(1979).

FIGURE A: OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SUGAR MILLS IN ZIMBABWE, 1980

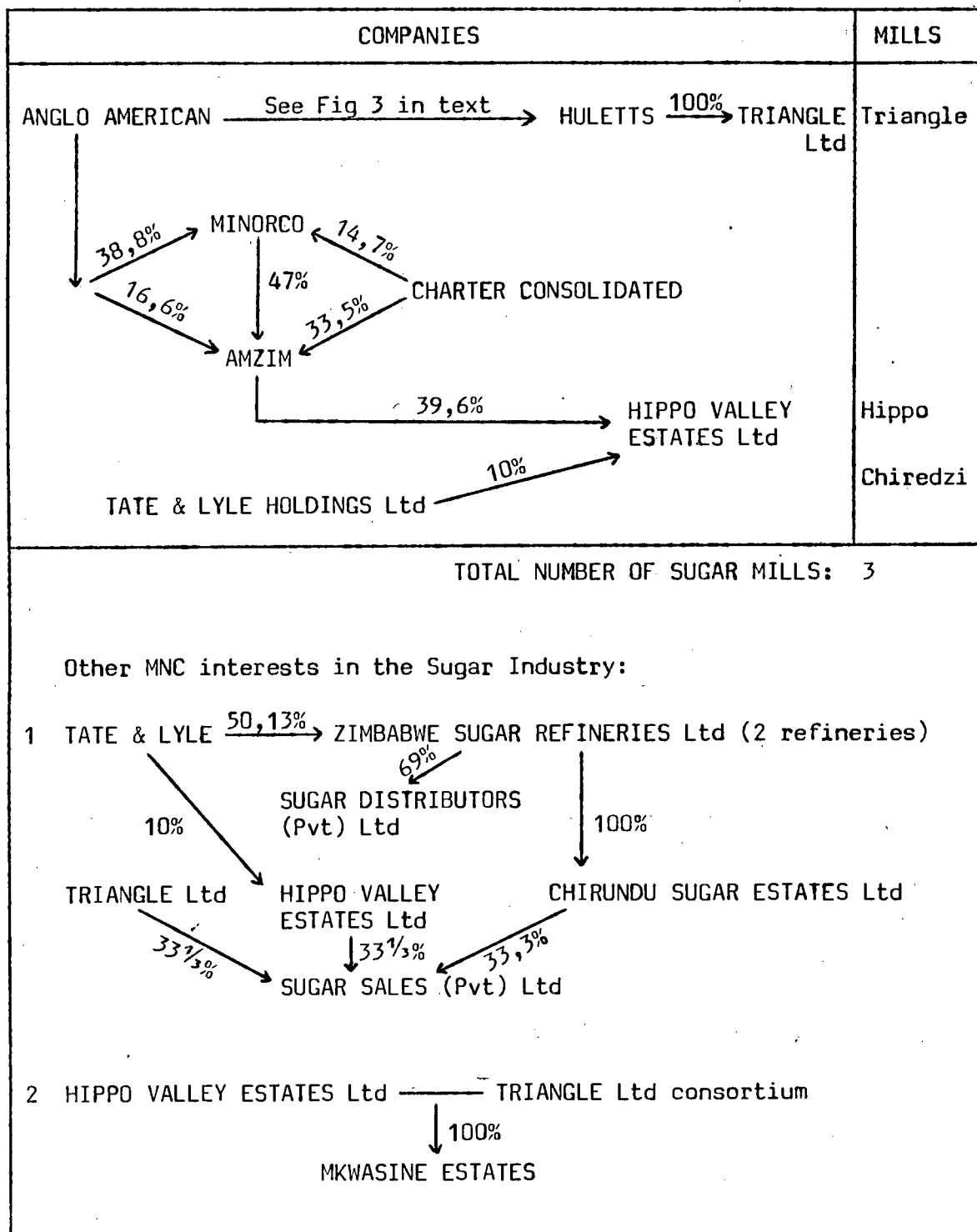


FIGURE 8: OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SUGAR MILLS IN SWAZILAND, 1980

COMPANIES	MILLS
<p>LONRHO Ltd ↓ 99% equity interest ↓ 64% beneficial interest LONRHO SUGAR CORPORATION Ltd $\xrightarrow{60\%}$ UBOMBO RANCHES Ltd</p>	Big Bend
<p>TATE & LYLE Ltd $\xrightarrow{8,73\%}$ ROYAL SWAZILAND SUGAR CORPORATION Ltd COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION $\xrightarrow{2,5\%}$ ROYAL SWAZILAND SUGAR CORPORATION Ltd SWAZILAND GOVERNMENT $\xrightarrow{32\%}$ ROYAL SWAZILAND SUGAR CORPORATION Ltd TIBIYO TAKA NGWANE FUND (A Swaziland National Trust Fund) $\xrightarrow{32\%}$ ROYAL SWAZILAND SUGAR CORPORATION Ltd (Tate & Lyle Technical Services Ltd responsible for management)</p> <p>MAJOR SOURCES OF FINANCIAL CAPITAL: Nigerian Government; International Finance Corporation; German Development Co; Coca-Cola Export Corp; Mitsui & Co.</p>	Simunye
<p>COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION $\xrightarrow{50\%}$ MHLUME (SWAZILAND) SUGAR Co Ltd NGWENYAMA OF SWAZILAND (A Swaziland National Trust Fund) $\xrightarrow{50\%}$ MHLUME (SWAZILAND) SUGAR Co Ltd</p>	Mhlume
<p>TOTAL NUMBER OF SUGAR MILLS: 3</p> <p>Other MNC Interests in the Sugar Industry:</p> <p>C G SMITH $\xrightarrow{14\%}$ CROOKES BROS Ltd $\xrightarrow{100\%}$ CROOKES PLANTATIONS Ltd</p>	

FIGURE C: OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SUGAR MILLS IN ZAMBIA, 1980

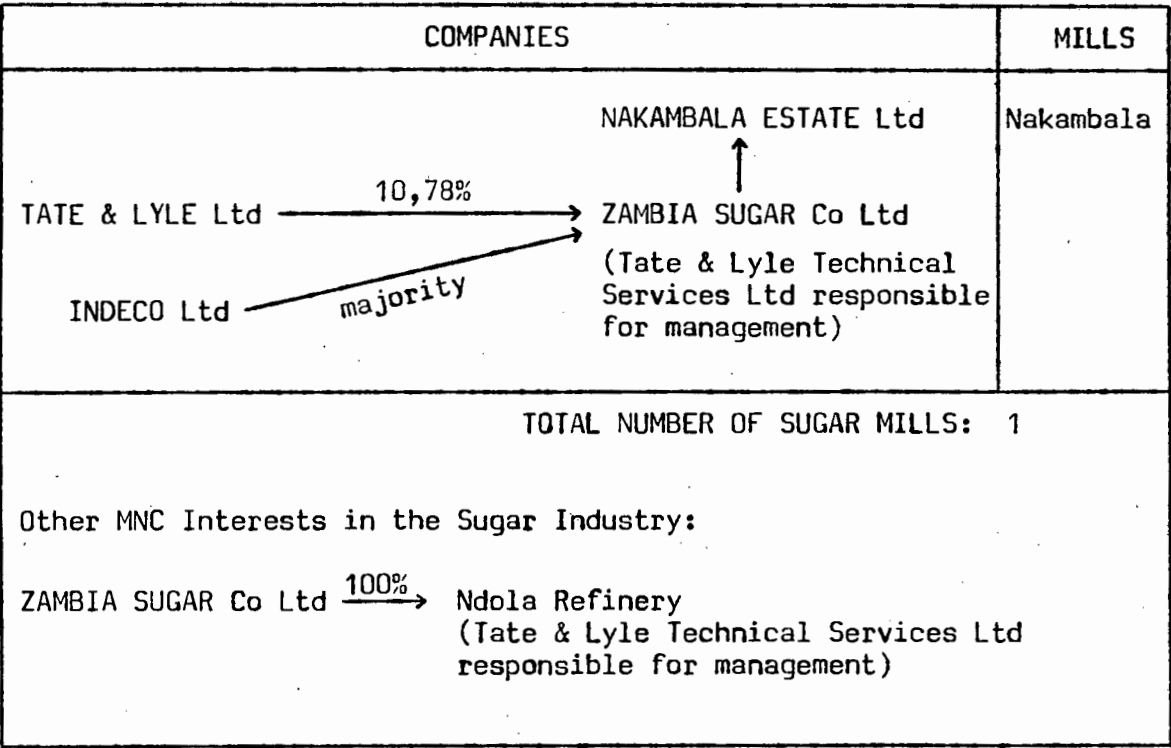
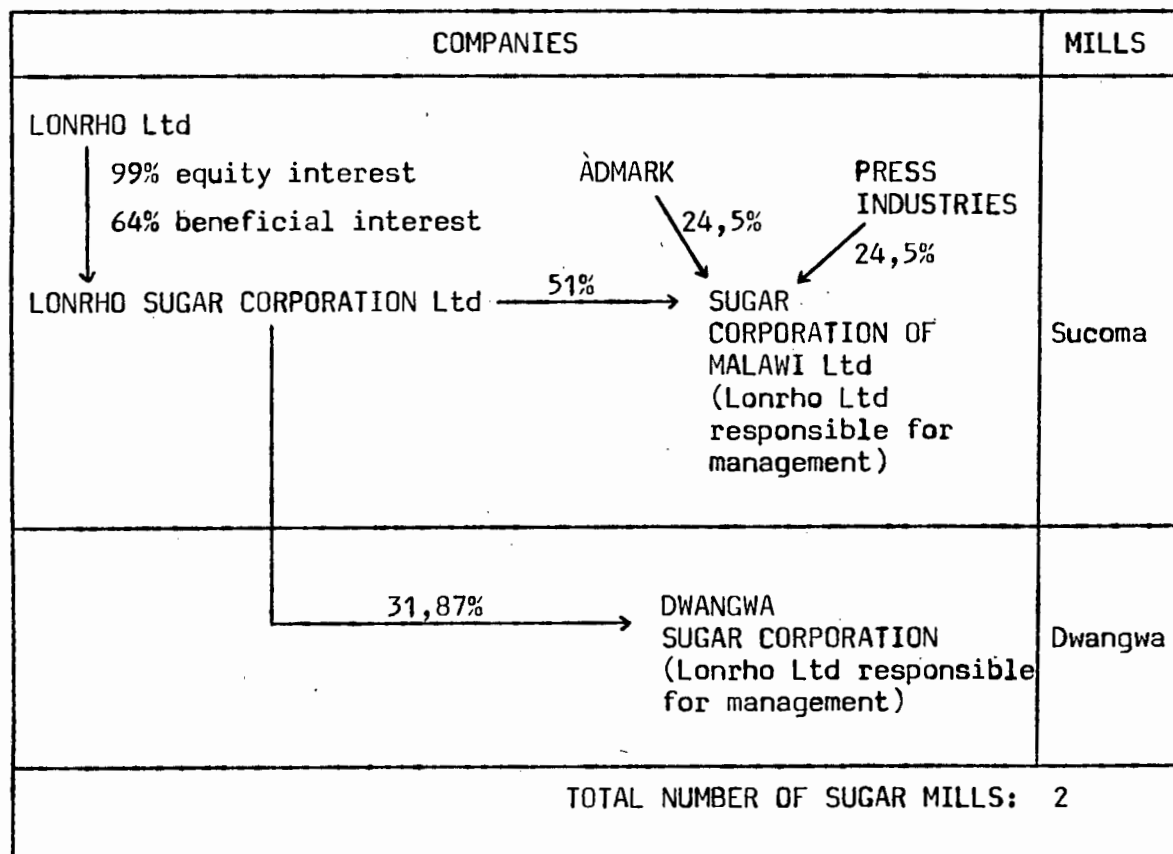


FIGURE D: OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SUGAR MILLS IN MALAWI, 1980



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INTERVIEWS

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Former pan-boiler of Mauritian descent, Tongaat, 28.6.1982.

Wife of sugarmill artisan (both of Mauritian descent), Gledhow, 29.6.1982.

Sugarmill artisan of Mauritian descent, Mount Edgecombe, 2.7.1982.

Former sugarmill artisan of Mauritian descent (retired), Mount Edgecombe district, 2.7.1982.

F.Khumalo and B.Dlamuka, NUSMRE officials, Durban, 3.1.1983.

B.Dlamuka, NUSMRE official, Durban, 9.9.1985.

E.Tough, Industrial Council for Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Industry Secretary, Durban, 9.9.1985.

J.Naidoo, SFAWU official, Durban, 10.9.1985.

T.Vogel, SASA Personnel Consultant, Durban, 11.9.1985.

A.Britz, AEU District Secretary, Durban, 12.9.1985.